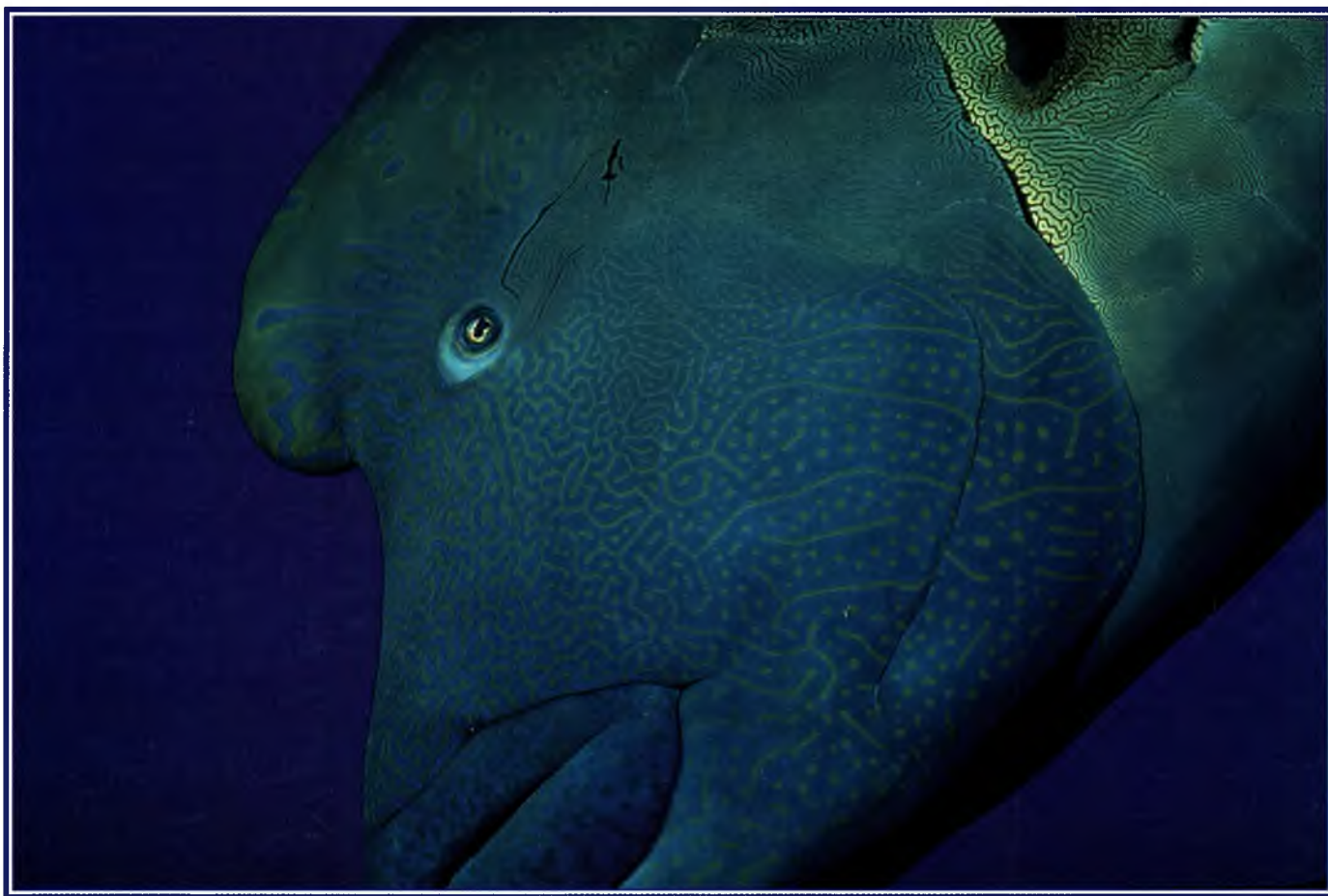


DIVE TRAVEL

Vol. X No. 1, FALL 1994

QUARTERLY

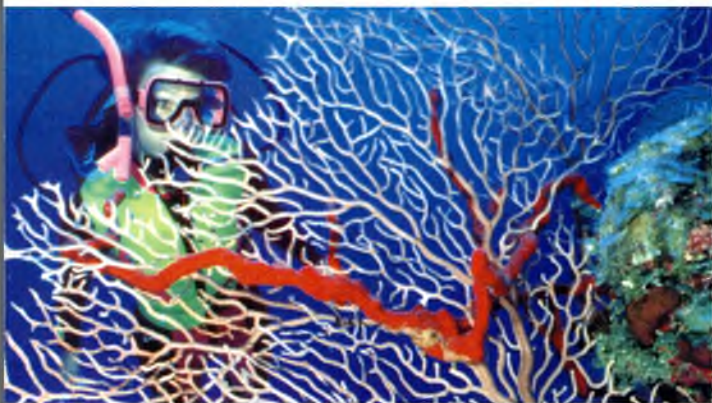
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AFTER THE GOLDEN AGE

It's been a long time since the golden age of exploration, but, up until about a 50 years ago, one could still find some remote corners of the planet without Coca Cola, hip-hop or printed T-shirts. There are precious few such places left on earth these days. More caravans of robust yuppies trek through Nepal in a season than crossed the ancient Silk Road in a decade, and some of the most popular dive sites are nearly to the point where they could install a take-a-number dispenser with those mooring buoys.

Divers may have a better time of it trying to find a reasonable facsimile of wilderness than terrestrial adventurers, but, even underwater, they have not only made their presence felt, they have virtually taken up residence. One place where the odds of finding pristine diiving pleasures are significantly better than average is the Solomon Islands.

World War II is probably the defining event beginning the modern age. It is certainly the event that brought the Solomons to the attention of the world, and, ironically, it is the multitude of wrecks from that war littering the waters that have brought the islands to the attention of divers today. But there is a lot more to diving in the Solomons than investigating its many fascinating wrecks. The Solomons have long been the exclusive province of liveaboard diving, but land-based resort diving has begun to take root there. Robert Aston examines the options beginning on page 40.

Closer to home the Western Caribbean provides a few exotic stops of its own along the road-less-traveled. Though not as remote as the Solomons, Honduras' Bay Islands possess a surprising repertoire of charms. My report, and F. Stuart Westmorland's photos, begin on page 46.

Meanwhile, a little to the northwest of the Bay Islands lies the world's second largest barrier reef and some of the world's best preserved tracts of Central American rainforest. Belize is fast becoming one of the favorite destinations for divers and travelers of every kind. Norbert Wu finds out why with camera and notebook at hand. His report begins on page 52.

As one of the more well-traveled destinations in the Caribbean, the Cayman Islands face very different kinds of challenges. There is, of course, plenty of great diving to be

done there—it is no accident that it has been so popular a dive destination for so long. Cayman is also the crossroads for the ever-growing fleet of cruise ships plying the Caribbean waters—huge floating luxury hotels and all their attendant problems: garbage, sewage and the impact of sheer numbers. It's more than these tiny islands were ever meant to handle.

Cayman has been very progressive in passing and enforcing environmental regulations to protect its fragile reefs, but there is pressure to compromise and millions in tourist dollars at stake. For years the battle has raged over construction of a cruise ship dock in George Town, on Grand Cayman. For now that idea has been defeated, but a new one has been installed in its place—a cruise ship dock in the community of West Bay. For dive operators a West Bay terminal is an appalling concept; construction would

threaten some of the best sites on the island. They have banded together to resist construction of a terminal in the area. As yet, nothing has been decided, but the battle continues and Gerard Braud examines the issues. Meanwhile, Ellen Sarbone did a tour of the sites, as they presently are, to give you some idea of what the shouting is all about. It all begins on page 32.

Dive Travel has been favored with the work of some very talented photographers and I feel lucky to count a few of them among my personal friends. Amos Nachoum is one of these. I trust one glance at the spectacular portfolio of his images, beginning of page 25, will dismiss any charges of cronyism on my part. Nachoum's success speaks for itself. He is one of the best outdoor/

adventure photographers working today. The most difficult thing about working with his photos is trying to decide which ones *not* to print—an unfortunate circumstance made inevitable by limited space.

This issue also samples some of the unspoiled diving on Christmas Island, explores the wreck of the *President Coolidge* in Vanuatu, and takes a tour of the Galapagos Islands on the *Reina Silva*. So, if you're sizing up a few potential destinations for your next expedition, you might consider some of those contained herein. Until then, warm up the coffee, put up your feet and plunge into the pages of this issue.

—John Newman

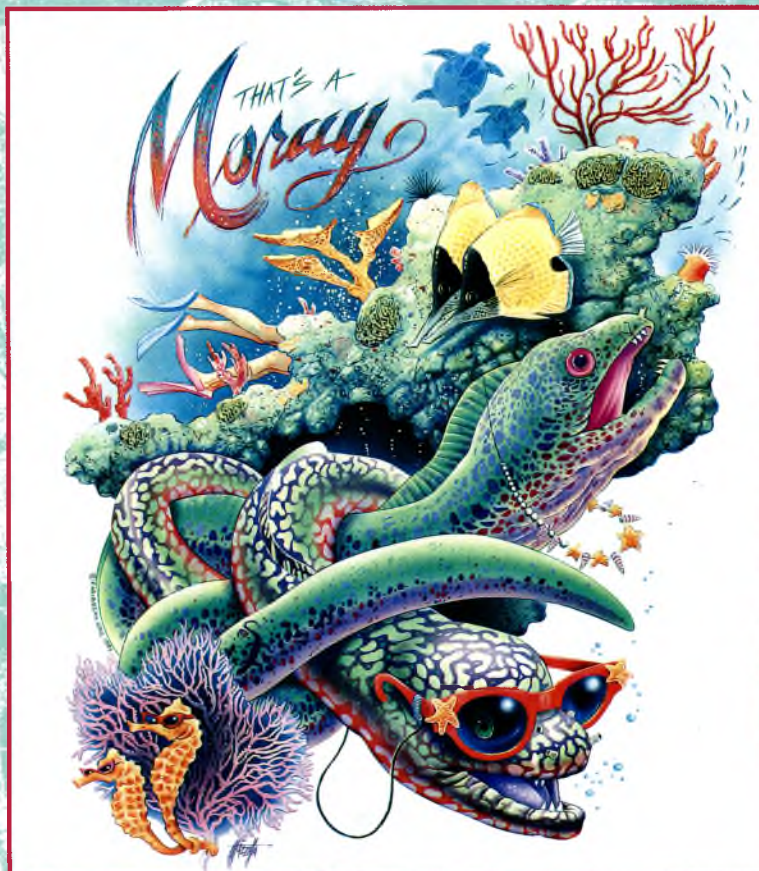


Clockwise from above:
Nachoum,
Sarbone and
Westmorland.

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VOLUME X, NUMBER 1

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COVER: Amos Nachoum

Correction:

Photos credits were mistakenly omitted from last issue's story "Equatorial Ecstasies." The photo of the hammerhead sharks on page 53, the diver and whale shark on page 54 and Moorish idols on page 55 are by Marc Bernardi. The photo of the diver on page 56 is by J. Gormley. All other photos are by Zbigniew Bzdak.

We regret the oversight.

Marc Bernardi's review of the live-aboard vessel *Reina Silva* can be found in this issue beginning on page 61.



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SOUNDINGS

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Charles Ballinger

ENVIRONMENT

WHAT YA GONNA DO WHEN THEY COME FOR YOU?

In the waters off Northern California, the humble abalone is the target of poachers large and small, but the ab cops are on the job....

From his position high atop the rocky bluff, officer Osh McNulty could scan the entire ocean cove. McNulty peered through his high-powered telescope and recorded in his small note pad: blue snorkel diver with orange float—10:22...10:30... 10:42...10:59...

One more abalone and this diver is in big trouble.

Forty feet below the diver knows he's reached his limit, but suddenly he spots a huge ten-incher. He

decides to switch it for a smaller one he already has, still bringing in his limit of four. It's illegal, but who would know?

The sport of abalone diving is experiencing a surge in popularity. Equipped with a wetsuit, snorkel and ab-iron, adventure seekers from all walks of life are scrambling to join in the hunt. It's an exciting sport, challenging and very rewarding when you consider that the market value of

these delicious mollusks is about \$35 a pound.

But as legions of divers descend in search of the abalone, pressure on the species and questions about its survival become more and more urgent. Will the abalone population be decimated? Are the regulations effective? Are the poachers being caught? I asked McNulty these questions, and, as an abalone diver for over ten years, I was surprised at some of his

answers.

Most abalone divers understand and respect the laws. They were created to insure a viable population of this species that grows a mere one inch per year.

In Northern California, a red abalone must measure at least seven inches to be taken and no more than four abalone may be taken at a time. Abalone pry bars must have blunt edges, the animals are hemophilic and will bleed to death if cut. A

small abalone taken by mistake must be put back where it was found. Regulation fixed-caliper gauges are required to accurately measure the shell. Absolutely no abalone may be taken using SCUBA equipment. All ab divers must possess a valid California sport fishing license.

Most of the citations McNulty issues involve divers trying to find loopholes in the regulations. High-grading is the practice of quickly taking the legal limit, then trading up to larger specimens as they are found. Some divers resent the high-grading restriction and feel justified in the practice as long as they keep only four, but high-grading is illegal and destroys many additional abalone.

Dry sacking is another popular practice among outlaw ab divers—filling another diver's quota by taking more than four abalone. Sometimes the other "diver" doesn't even get wet. McNulty once caught a single diver supplying five friends with their limit—difficult to explain since they had only one wetsuit. More commonly divers fill the quotas of their less successful dive buddies. McNulty issues a citation either way.

Fines are determined by specific circumstances, but the bail schedule is not forgiving. Divers are commonly fined \$250 per illegal abalone and taking abalone with SCUBA gear will cost you at least \$500 and all of your gear. In Sonoma County alone about 375 citations are issued every year and violations aren't just small time high-graders and dry sackers. A surveillance operation broke up a major poaching operation. A boat with 600 abs was captured and confiscated

and the owner assessed a \$10,000 fine and given nine months in jail. McNulty once spent the night waiting out a poacher who had left 50 abalones and his SCUBA gear stashed in a cave. When he eventually returned, he was caught red-handed.

Overall enforcement is effective, but the increased number of divers has increased pressure on the abalone and on the officers enforcing the regulations. In 1975, the old limit of five was reduced to four and it could be reduced still further. There is now talk of an abalone stamp that would provide funds earmarked for monitoring and enforcement, at present only a Pacific Ocean sport fishing stamp is required. Some are suggesting a yearly limit on the abalone catch.

To many of the old-time ab divers this all sounds like stifling over-regulation, but it is becoming necessary to protect the survival of the abalone. Greater awareness of, and compliance with, the regulations, particularly with regard to high-grading and dry sacking, could help make tougher laws unnecessary. Dive shops might provide copies of the regulations and issue licenses only after the rules have been read. Many divers who are issued citations plead ignorance with a clear conscience.

But ignorance is no excuse and the dive cops are out there to see that the laws are enforced. Sixteen-year veteran ranger Dan Murley passes a few quiet moments on the cliff paraphrasing the lyrics of a popular rock tune:

"Every dive you make,
Every ab you take,
We'll be watching you..."

a tune made popular, appropriately enough, by none other than...the Police.

—Charles Ballinger



LOOKING GOOD

Cosmetics and the Creature from the Deep

It's August and my nails are still shredded from diving in June. Scuba diving is great fun, but why is it so rough on my poor body? I mean—my nails, my hair, my skin—everything was a wreck for weeks after my last two diving vacations. I wanted to dive wrecks, not become one.

Something tells me this is a female thing. I've never heard any of the guys I've dived with complain that their acrylic nail came off in the water, or that their new perm has fallen out from exposure to salt and sun. But surely, environmental conditions effect the male physique. Maybe it's invisible.

Most non-divers don't know about this facet of diving, and the diving industry works hard to see that it doesn't get out. It's tough enough trying to

convince my girlfriends to learn how to dive when they think that a shark, or a barracuda, or even a manta ray might get them. When they look at the unedited photos of my diving vacations and see that I come off the boat looking like an extra from *Planet of the Apes*, well, let's just say they decide to take up golf instead.

Looking good on a dive boat is no easy trick, unless you're a 20-year-old super-model. The kind that looks good when she wakes up in the woods, halfway through a backpacking trip across the Rockies, without having been near an electrical outlet for days. It's easy to hate a woman like that, even if she is nice. Fortunately, most women divers do not fit that description. So we all end up looking lumpy and sodden in our wet, smelly lycra

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outfits—because we're all looking bad together we can stay cheerful and enjoy a kind of hideous camaraderie. The other good news is that at least 50 percent of the men don't look so hot in their lycra either, even though they may not be suffering in silent anguish from severe hair-dresser and manicurist deprivation.

My private nightmare is that I will one day encounter the man of my dreams on a dive boat. He and I will hit it off immediately on our way to the site. We'll buddy up and have the diving thrill of the decade together. He will be radically different from other male buddies—paying attention to where I am and even deciding to go back to the boat while he still has a little air in his tank. But then comes the dreaded moment when we climb out of the water and get back on the boat. I have been transformed into the creature from the black lagoon. I wish I could think of it as a chance to prove he's not shallow, but in all honesty, if I were wearing his fins, I'd take a raincheck. Statistically, the probability of a woman meeting a single man on a dive trip is pretty good—the prospect for romance is grim.

I can't even begin to count the number of times I've thought of meandering over to the beach bar after the last dive of the day, when a cold piña colada and a hot young divemaster sound like the perfect way to end the day. But I know my hair is a matted tangled nightmare, my skin looks like the surface of the moon, my nails look like I did them with paint stripper and my face looks like a raccoon's from the sunglasses I've been wearing on the boat all

day. Forget the bar, I should be considering a convent.

There's something very sexy about scuba diving, but when I look in the mirror the day I get on the airplane to come home, I can't imagine what it is. My suntan looks swell, but by the time I repair the rest of the damage my suntan will be a fond memory. Several men I've dated who are not divers have fantasized about taking a dive trip with me—so far I've avoided it.

It's time that women divers demanded western civilization's highly regarded technology be focused on a problem of real significance. How about special diving gloves that keep your fingernails from turning into 200-layer flaky puff pastry after your third dive? Maybe some kind of space-age lacquer that 20 hours of seawater will not eat through? How about a hairspray that smells like mangos and will keep your hair from turning into broom bristles? What about a line of skin products to counteract the effects of 20 submersions a week? I know I could make a fortune on these ideas if I had a mind for business. Any entrepreneur out there who wants to steal this idea, be my guest. It's yours, just hurry.

How about some of the dive equipment manufacturers? You know divers are affluent and compulsive purchasers. We'll pay almost any price for something that enhances the diving experience, and looking good when I get out of the water would most definitely enhance mine.

Maybe next time I'll just bring a big hat and a pair of big, and very dark, sunglasses. Maybe I'll stay on the boat.

—Teresa Foley



Paul Janosi

PHOTOGRAPHY

SHOOT OUT ON THE REEF

Making the most of your underwater exposures

Perhaps the least invasive fishing you can do is angling with a camera. If practiced prudently, with respect for the delicate nature of the submarine systems that are being observed and documented, photography is environmentally harmless. And it is precisely for this reason that recreational scuba divers are so attracted to the medium. It is the only ecologically defensible way to bring back proof of the experience. Indeed many underwater photographs serve as two dimensional light-sensitive paper trophies. But, in the words of Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message, and eventually a certain small percentage of photographers are inevitably channeled in the direction of the artistic. These are the ones who come to use the medium as a means to creative expression. These are the ones who work to refine their images with respect to composition, exposure, subject matter and so on.

And these are the ones


who are likely to submit their finished work to Photo Contests. It's a great way for amateurs to achieve some recognition, and, in some cases, a little extra cash. What's more, winning a few doesn't look bad on your resumé when you think that you're skilled enough to consider turning pro.

One good way to get your feet wet, so to speak, is in one of the Nikonos Shootout photo contests. The \$100,000 in prizes and 75 prizes in each shootout make the odds of winning fairly high, and the Nikonos shootout is free. You must, however, pre-register.

Regular shootout competition is restricted to Nikonos viewfinder type cameras, but there is a separate competition for any SLR type camera. There's still time to register for the 1994 Shootout in Cayman, July 9-16. For rules, itinerary, or reservations at host hotels call Waterhouse Photo Tours: (800) 272-9122.

—Pleasant Williams

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RAINBOW DIVERS

Maui's most experienced dive operator. Two boats daily depart for Molokini Crater and Lanai's famous cathedral caverns & lava tubes. Located in down-town Lahaina, our full-service dive store offers air fills, rental & retail equipment, certification classes & hotel info. For more information, call or write: Central Pacific Divers & Hawaiian Reef Divers, 156 Lahainaluna Rd., Lahaina, Maui, HI 96761. TELE (800) 551-6767 or (808) 667-7647 FAX (808) 661-7180.



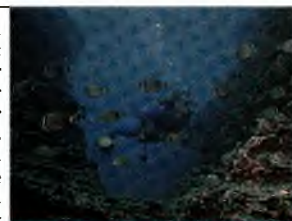
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Dive Kauai Scuba Center is the first PADI 5-star Instructor Development Center on Kauai. We offer certification classes from Open Water, Advanced, Rescue Diver, Divemaster, and we train aspiring instructors. Boat dives aboard Kulia (28' custom-built dive boat). Hotel/dive/car packages available. For more info call (800) 828-3483 or write Dive Kauai Scuba Center, 976 Kuhio Highway, Kapaa, Kauai, Hawaii 96746. Phone (808) 822-0452 FAX (808) 823-6515.



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Kohala Divers, Ltd. offers the selective diver the opportunity of diving the spectacular Kohala Coast on the Big Island of Hawaii. This PADI 5-star dive center is just 30 minutes from Keohole Airport and nearby prestigious resorts. Come dive with us on our uncrowded, unspoiled reefs. For more information, call or write: Kohala Divers, P.O. Box 44940, Kawaihae, Hawaii 96743. Phone: (808) 882-7774.



KOHALA DIVERS



Paul Mockler

INDUSTRY NEWS

BEYOND THE BIG BLUE

For free-diving legend Jacques Mayol there's more down there than records

If you saw the movie *The Big Blue*, you watched what was, although cinematically enhanced, a representation of the life and exploits of former world free-dive record holder, Jacques Mayol. Mayol's record dive of 100 meters (344 feet) back in 1984 has been eclipsed several times since, most recently by Francisco "Pipin" Ferreras who plunged to 125 meters (410 feet), but Mayol continues to be something of a legend in the world of free diving. And a curious world it is.

Even though free diving is no longer recognized as a sport internationally, it is still hugely popular, particularly in Europe and Japan which have long-standing traditions of commercial free diving. Only Italy still recognizes free diving as a sport, and then only in two of three categories:

Constant Weight—The diver descends and ascends along a vertical guide cable using only the power of his or her fins, never touching the cable or varying the weight.

Variable Weight—The diver descends with a weight equal to 1/3 of his or her body weight, but not exceeding 30 kilos (66 pounds). The diver abandons the weight before ascending and may use the cable to aid ascent.

No-limits—this is the category no one recognizes, but it is the one that attracts all the attention. Descending on a cable with a ballast of unlimited weight, the diver abandons it then ascends with the aid of an inflated balloon. The aim is simply to go as deep as you can, with whatever it takes to get there.

No-limits is the category where Ferreras and his chief rival, Humberto

Pellizarri, jockey for the title of the World's Deepest Man, just as Mayol and legendary Sicilian diver Enzo Maiorca did two decades ago. Ferreras confidently claims that he will descend to 500 feet on a single breath before it's all over, but the contest to go deeper, simply for the sake of going deeper, is of little interest to Mayol, even though he was the pioneer of the no-limits style. In fact, it was Mayol's record dives in the early '70s that pushed deep free diving beyond the purview of sport into the realm of scientific experimentation.

If Mayol's free diving in the '70s transcended the realm of sport into the realm of experimentation, his latest exploits have transcended science and begun to edge into the realm of mysticism.

The final scene in *The Big Blue* depicts Mayol swimming off into the immensity of the ocean in the company of a dolphin, an appropriate and oddly prophetic image. Lately Mayol has been doing nearly all of his diving in the company of dolphins in connection with something he calls the Homo-Delphinus Project.

The goal of the Homo-Delphinus Project was for Mayol to dive to 45 meters (148 feet) in the company of two male Atlantic bottlenose dolphins. A task he accomplished with the help of Bimini and Stripe, two long-time residents of UNEXSO, in the same Bahamian abyss where Ferreras made his record dive.

At the desired depth Mayol extended his arms, the two dolphins positioned themselves on either side of him, Mayol took hold of their dorsal fins and the dolphins returned him to the surface. It was, as the promotional materials declare, a simple plan, though Mayol's moti-

vations for pursuing it are considerably less so.

No one has previously dived to 45 meters in the company of dolphins, of course, but that's not the kind of record that will generate the interest of Ferreras and Pellizarri's abyssal plunges. Dolphins, even though they normally spend their time in shallow water, are capable of diving to 200 meters (650 feet) with relative ease. Some species, such as the Pacific Bottlenose and Fraser's Dolphin are on record going as deep as 500 meters (1,625 feet). No one will be particularly surprised to see them dive to 45 meters.

Officially the dive was "a symbol of the affinities and relationship between *homo sapiens* and *cetaceans*....an eco-sensitive statement of faith and tribute to Mother Nature, the sea and to our marine cousins, the dolphins."

While that is undoubtedly true, it is also true that Mayol has parlayed his unique talents for holding his breath and concocting media events with a deep and abiding passion for aquatic communion. He has fashioned for himself a lifestyle, and a career, of seeking in the depths.

The voluntary retention of breath (apnea, as it is known scientifically) is the original technique for air-breathing creatures to penetrate a liquid medium. Most mammals are capable of holding their breath when submerged, if only for a short time. Marine mammals, such as *pinipeds* and *cetaceans*, are capable of the most spectacular apneic feats, as you might expect. The elephant seal appears to sleep gliding along at great depths, where it is safe from attack, while holding its breath. The sperm whale has clocked down-time up to an

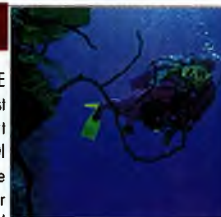
MEXICO



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 - Nice beach
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- Phone: (800) 247-3483; in WA: (206) 441-4383; FAX: (206) 441-5431.



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hour and a half.

While no human being has managed to approach that kind of time, a few exceptional yogis have declined to breathe for up to 18 minutes, during meditation, in medically controlled experiments—not bad for a terrestrial species. Researchers noted some of the same metabolic changes in their test subjects that have been observed in their ocean-going cousins. That is exactly the kind of data that piques the interest of the ever-curious Mayol who sees apnea as a good deal more than a way for unassisted air-breathers to survive temporary submersion.

For Mayol, it is a thread leading back into the mysterious origins of our own species—in the womb, and further back still, in the primordial sea.

If Mayol is capable of unraveling that thread it won't be at a computer screen analyzing data. Mayol is not the kind of man who is satisfied with mapping a journey he hasn't made. His search will be made under the power of his flippers and probably in the company of his oceanic cousins.

If there is something to find in the vastness of the big blue, Mayol will be out there looking for it.

—John Newman

LITTLE SISTER DOES IT ALL

Next time you find yourself in Little Cayman you might try a spin on the *MV Little Sister*, Little Cayman Beach Resort's newest ship of the line. Built by Newton Boat Building in Slidell, Louisiana, she measures out at 41' bow to stern, and 16' abeam.

As many as 30 people can dive from the *Little Sister* in comfort and she's completely outfitted for deep-sea fishing as well. Navigation is handled by a state-of-the-art GPS system, and a pair of big horse twin caterpillar engines provide

the power.

Little Sister is expected to cover a lot of bases in her service to Little Cayman Beach Resort.

"We felt we needed a vessel that would expand the services available to our customers," says Dan Tibbetts, President of Little Cayman Beach Resort. "Sport fishing is becoming more and more in demand here. We also saw the need for a fast cargo carrier, and, of course, she'll be a treat to dive from."

So far *Little Sister* has shouldered the load with grace and style.



John Newman

PRODUCTS

OCEAN LIFE: COMING TO A SCREEN NEAR YOU

*Seeking Mulloidichthys flavolineatus
with 6 megs of RAM*

If technology hasn't yet made enough inroads in your life, here's another opportunity to outfit your ride with accessories for the trip down the information super-highway. Load those dusty fish identification

books into cartons for the trip to the used bookstore, and stock up on snappy new interactive CD Roms from Sumeria. Well, actually, you may want to hang on to your books for a little while yet, but Sumeria's Ocean Life

series, is off to a promising start.

Sumeria plans to put out 12 volumes eventually, detailing 25,000 species—a pretty sizable library in book form, sans narration, music and maps—all of which are included on the CD. Each entry displays a video loop of the subject, written text and a distribution map. The text is concise and authoritative—the first few volumes are based on the work of noted fisheries biologist Robert Myers.

Minimum requirements for Mac are system 7.0; 6 MB of RAM; 13" monitor with 256, or better, colors; CD-ROM drive with sustained transfer rate of 150 Kps or better. If you're an IBMie, you'll need CPU with 386/33MHz or higher processor; 6 MB of RAM; DOS 5.0, Windows 3.1; VGA+ display with 256, or better, colors at 640x480 resolution; sound card; CD-ROM drive with a sustained transfer rate of 150 Kps or better. All the CDs are hybrid format, meaning they will run on

either system.

Volume One (the South Western Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu) was issued over a year ago and by today's standard is fairly primitive. The video, running on an early version of QuickTime, looks a little jerky, there is no sound track and the number of species somewhat limited. Volume Two (Micronesia) marks a substantial leap forward. The video is smoother, sound-track and narration have been added, and 147 species are covered on two separate disks. Volume Three (Hawaii) marks another step forward, although perhaps not as dramatic. The video is smoother and the color better. The section on fish morphology has been expanded and a fish family index has been added. A general area map is now included that allows you to focus on specific islands, or island groups, from a general map of the entire archipelago.

In addition, a new section called reef life

US VIRGIN ISLANDS

AMERICA'S DIVE PARADISE

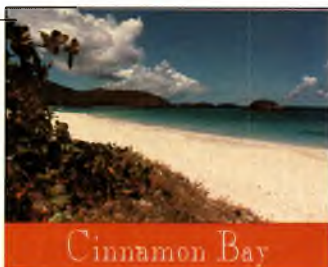
PADI five star IDC training facility on beautiful St. John. Daily two-tank dives and beginner dives, as well as reef, wreck and night dives. Three custom boats. Dive packages available with the Gallows Point Hotel, featuring luxury condos located on the water—just a short walk to town. P.O. Box 431, St. John, USVI 00831. (800) 835-7718, or (809) 776-7048.



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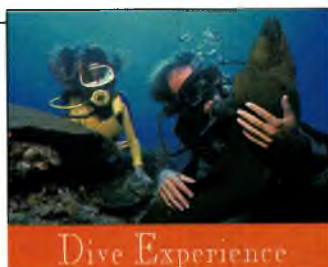


Cinnamon Bay is a family-oriented campground in the Virgin Islands National Park, offering accommodations to fit every budget—from cottages to tents to bare sites all within a 1-2 minute stroll from the longest, least crowded beach on St. John. Scuba diving and snorkeling are available through Bob Carney on the fully equipped dive boat M.V. Cinnamon Bay. Call (809) 776-6330 Ext. 26 or (809) 776-6111



Cinnamon Bay

Get to know St. Croix's underwater wildlife through Dive Experience. Our 28' custom Delta boat speeds you to fantastic walls, canyons, wrecks, and miles of coral reef. We also offer freindly, personalized courses daily for the novice as well the experienced diver. Our clientele is mostly return business, and once you have found us you will understand why. Call (800) 235-9047.



Dive Experience

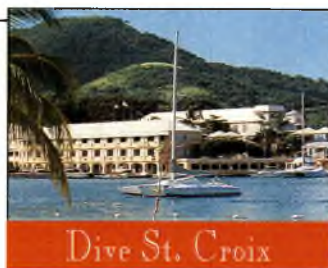


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Scuba divers can enjoy the beauty of St. Croix's spectacular underwater marine life and drop-offs with a dive crew who are fully qualified and knowledgeable. We give you our personal attention and special dive experience from the moment you step aboard. Hotel/dive packages available through King Christian hotel. For more information call (800) 524-2012 or (800) 523-DIVE.



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Hi-Tec Water Sports

documents 12 different behaviors observed among the creatures of the reef. Volume Four (Australia and the Great Barrier Reef) is scheduled for release in July of 1994, and if the trend continues you can expect it to be even better than the first three.

In any case, if you're a diver or marine naturalist doubling as a computer nerd, Sumeria's disks are a worthwhile acquisition. In addition to the handy hybrid format, text and video loops are easily extracted and imported and the search feature quickly scans the text to locate a designated target.

A whole encyclopedia of fun-to-play-with piscine pals at your electronic fingertips—such a deal!

—Frémir Bamboula

INDUSTRY NEWS

COFFEE, TEA OR D- PHENOTHHRIN?

*Are you getting
more than you
bargained for in
those flights across
the frontier?*

Perfect dive vacation? Let's see, gin-clear water, plenty of mantas, undisturbed reefs, a hammock with a sunset-view, and a spritz of insecticide on the plane before you land.

Insecticide? That's right. It could happen to you—depending on where you book your next exotic dive vacation, and on which airline. Perhaps it already has, if you've traveled to one of the more than 20 countries that spray the passenger compartments of the aircraft

THE OLD SHELL GAME

- The shell of a sea urchin is known as a test.

- The Wentletrap shell was so rare that Chinese merchants sold forgeries made from rice paste.

- Some areas of the sea floor contain as many as 8,000 living shells of one type in an area of only 1.2 square yards.

- Virtually every kind of shelled mollusk is capable of producing a pearl, even the shellless sea hare (*Aplysia*) produces pearls.

- Giant *Tridacna* clams sometimes produce pearls the size of a golf ball.

- Pearls attached to the oyster shell are called blister pearls.

- Pearls are 91 percent

calcium carbonate, 6 percent conchiolin material and 3 percent water.

- The Glory of the Sea (*Conus gloriamaris*) is one of the rarest and most valuable seashells in the world. Only 70 known specimens exist.

- The Queen conch, or pink conch, occasionally produces pink pearls.

- The chambered nautilus, from whose ancestors the squid and octopus evolved, has been roaming the world's oceans for 450 million years.

- The slowest growing of all the creatures on earth is the deep-sea clam, taking a century to grow to the length of .30 inch.

—Bryan Henry

Knight Roach Killer, settles on the clothing and skin of both crew members and travelers. And there is the additional danger of inhaling the poison because, note officials of the Environmental Protection Agency, the aircraft's ventilation system is turned off during spraying.

While the insecticides used are reputed to have a low toxicity to humans, there have been complaints from flight attendants and passengers of nausea and headaches, fatigue, seizures, and, in other more extreme cases, reduced cognitive skills, a depressed immune system and memory loss. The Environmental Protection Agency warns that people with allergies, asthma and other respiratory problems, and chemical sensitivities may be at an especially high risk with this type of exposure.

United States Transportation Secretary Federico Peña has called for a halt to the practice of

spraying planes while passengers and crew are aboard. In a letter this spring to international transportation officials, Peña stated that if the practice is not stopped, the U.S. would begin warning its international travelers.

"Concern over the spraying of insecticides inside the aircraft cabin is based on possible long-term health effects, as well as immediate allergic reactions from the sprays," Peña commented in a letter approved by the U.S. State Department. He further noted that most nations, including the United States, which stopped the practice 15 years ago, no longer require spraying not only because of the health risks it poses to air travelers, but also because of its questionable effectiveness.

A spokesman for the Air Transport Association, Chris Ciames, applauded Peña's request but stated the airline industry is not pleased that passengers would be warned. The industry would prefer the government stepped up pressure to stop the spraying. Ciames stated, "The industry's position is that the resolution of this issue has to be on a government-to-government basis."

The Air Transport Association said that the following countries require cabin spraying with people on board: Antigua, Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Mexico, Panama, Peru, St. Lucia, St. Martin and Venezuela. The U.S. territory of Guam also requires spraying, as does the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas.

—Spike Allen



John Newman

with insecticide before landing. Countries in the Caribbean, South America and the South Pacific do the spraying in order to prevent the introduction of disease-bearing or crop-damaging pests.

It happens like this: About 30 minutes before landing, flight attendants walk down the aisle, spraying the insecticide—usually d-phenothrin—over the passenger compartment. The insecticide, a compound sold in stores as Black

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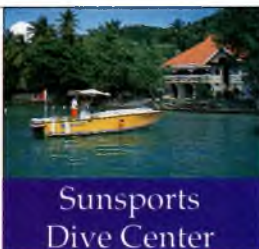




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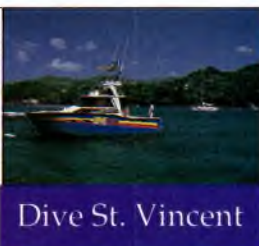
Sunsports
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Discover Bequia's island charm, our friendly hospitality, & affordable rates. Our 8 garden bungalows, handcrafted in natural woods and stone, are ideally located on Admiralty Bay. SCUBA dive with Sunsports Dive Center. After diving, enjoy excellent cuisine & relax at our waterfront restaurant/bar.



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Dive our unbelievable virgin reefs & breathtaking walls with the longest established dive operator in St. Vincent. Three fast boats comfortably take divers to sites, most only 10 minutes away. NAUI & PADI courses available. Dive computers welcomed. Day trips to Bequia are also available.



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(800) 729-1726

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T R I P S

DESTINATIONS FOR THE ADVENTUROUS DIVER



WHERE EVERY DAY IS CHRISTMAS

So you're on your way to your favorite dive destination and after six-plus hours of travel you're still cooling your heels in Honolulu's airport. You've stopped by and said hi to the barber so many times you're on a first-name basis. You spent so many traveler's checks in the duty-free shop the clerk is getting suspicious. You've eaten enough macadamia nuts to send your cholesterol levels over 300. So, you stretch out in one of those comfortable plastic airport chairs and dream about the warm clear tropical waters in which you'll soon be diving, the billions of colorful creatures on the pristine reefs just waiting for you to take that prize-winning underwater photo. Suddenly you're awakened by the boarding announcement for your flight. Ah, only another 12 hours before your dream becomes reality....

Would it surprise you to find out that your dream was waiting just a short three-hour flight from Honolulu the whole time? Due south, just 110 miles north of the equator, lies the largest coral atoll in the world and the Pacific's most exciting new dive destination—Christmas Island. Christmas Island is part of the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced Kiribas), formerly known as the Gilbert Islands. It enjoys year-round near-perfect weather, with an air temperature between 74-84 degrees F, minimal rain and low humidity due to the gentle trade winds and water



Murray Kaufmann



temperature consistently between 80-84 degrees F.

An Air Nauru 737 to Christmas Island leaves Honolulu every Tuesday at 10:00 AM. After a brief check through Kiribati customs, you will be met by Kim Anderson, owner and operator of Dive Kiribati. A short ride takes you to the Captain Cook Hotel, a simple, unpretentious lodge with clean rooms, hot

showers and 120-volt electricity. The native-style bungalows are located near the beach and the dining room serves American-style meals that are tasty, plentiful and varied—often including fresh local seafood.

Your next stop is the village of London, the base of operations for Dive Kiribati. It is a simple looking operation—twin shacks that function as a dive shop and Anderson's residence—but don't be deceived by appearances. Anderson, a veteran NAUI instructor and hyperbaric chamber operator, knows how to put together a sophisticated dive operation. A two-person hyperbaric chamber, twin compressors and 100 aluminum 80 tanks compliment *Spirit of Christmas*, Anderson's 38-

foot outrigger canoe dive boat. The boat comfortably accommodates six to eight divers and 40 tanks for a full days diving. It is remarkably stable underway, or at anchor, and serves as an excellent dive tender. With the outrigger platform doubling as a camera table, the routine is as simple as stand up, gear up, roll over, grab your camera and go. Helpful hands make it simple to remove your gear in the water and climb the small ladder at the end of your dive. Anderson's approach is live-aboard style, allowing three to five dives per day including night dives. You are limited only by your computer and your stamina. Breaks between dives are an excellent opportunity to comb deserted beaches, snorkel (frequently with dolphins or pilot whales), sunbathe or try your hand at some of Christmas' excellent deep-sea fishing.

Most of the dive sites identified so far are on the west, or lee, side of the island—normally only a 15-to 30-minute

ride from the dock (the road around Christmas Island is 70 miles long and only about one-third of the fringing reef has been explored). A good first-dive-of-the-day is a deep dive at Lionfish Wall. The wall starts at about 75 feet where you will find huge anemones and a thick crowd of lionfish parading along the wall. You can also expect to see guinea fowl puffers and eels that frequent the area to be cleaned by shrimp, and many pairs of rare soapfish.

A short channel crossing takes you to Cook Island, a bird sanctuary in the mouth of the lagoon. A number of deep water pinnacles have been located here, rising from 120 feet to within 30 feet of the surface. At the base of Pete's Pinnacle (about 75 feet), you will find huge schools of trevally jacks and barracudas. As you ascend you encounter dense swarms of blueline snappers and clouds of anthias. The coral-encrusted top of the pinnacle is populated by an endless variety of colorful reef fish—emperor angels, flame angels, lemon peel angels, gold-spotted angels and pairs of butterflyfish (threadfin, saddleback, raccoon, four-spot, blue-stripe, lined, ornate, teardrop, Meyer's reticulated, the list goes on), damsels, grouper in dozens of varieties, countless types of surgeon fish, wrasses, parrotfish and more.

The pinnacle known as Lea's Lions Den is home to volitans, spotfin and zebra lionfish, as well as the rare oscillated lionfish. If you look closely you will find resident pairs of gobies populating the hundreds of black wire corals growing from the wall near the top of the pinnacle. Two of the other pinnacles, Grapple Rocks and Murray's Manta Dive, are known for frequent encounters with Pacific mantas and large Napoleon wrasses. The mantas have been known to come within touching distance while performing their intricate underwater feeding ballet.

En route to the southwest point you will come to Mark's Coral Garden. It is an expansive, open-water plateau with a staggering variety of stony corals including finger, antler, cauliflower, star, lobed brain, mushroom and lettuce leaf. Carpet anemones with green background, blue edging and red veins resemble exotic Persian carpets, and on each one a pair of resident egg shell shrimp can be found.

At southwest point is a spectacular site known as Poland Caves. Here you can encounter giant hammerheads, white-tipped and black-tipped reef sharks, turtles, mantas and dolphins, all

Continued on page 65

A MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

In the far western Pacific lies the wreckage of the President Coolidge

The *President Coolidge* was built in 1931 by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company. She was operated as a luxury liner by the American President Lines until the United States entered the war in the South Pacific. At that time she was drafted into service as a troop carrier for U.S. troops being deployed in the Solomon Islands. On

October 6, 1942 she sailed for New Hebrides and Espiritu Santo. While entering the channel to Espiritu Santo on October 26, she struck an American mine. The captain ran the ship aground in an attempt to off-load the 5,000 troops that were aboard. All but two men, Captain Elwood J. Ewart of the 103 Field Artillery Battalion and Robert Reid, a fireman, made it off the ship before she slid down the reef and sank. The *President Coolidge* now lies about 100 yards from the shore on her port side.

Our dive guide on the *President Coolidge* is Allan Power. He came to Vanuatu in the early '70s to photograph the salvaging of propellers and brass shell casings and never left.

As we unload our gear from the trailer, Allan explains our first dive using a diagram of the ship to emphasize key points. After the briefing, we suit up, check our buddies and cameras, and then walk out through the shallows for 60 yards to the top of the reef. When the water gets five feet deep we duck under and swim to the coral gardens surrounding the safety stop area. Allan offers Boris, the resident giant sea bass and guardian of the wreck, a few fish in exchange for safe passage.

We begin our descent by following the line from the safety stop down to the



John Nikel

bow. At about 40 feet, we begin to see the dark form appear—the size of the wreck is overwhelming. From the bow we can see the starboard side of the hull stretching off into the blue depths. We swim along the edge of the hull, and then drop over the side along the main deck. The bottom is 40 feet below, and just ahead the structure of the ship's bridge.

We stop briefly to examine an anti-aircraft gun mounted on the deck. Tucked along the underside of the gun mount is a squadron of lion fish. As we enter the hold, Allan shines his light on a barber's chair bolted to the now-vertical deck. We look around, and notice other things, such as the pile of jeeps and trucks that fell over as the ship sank.



John Nikel

Further back in the hold, through a side passage, we discover a twisted pile of tires and frames, lying as if tossed into a child's

toy box. As we move back out of the hold we find a set of china, and other items collected from the wreck, and placed here by Allan.

Returning up the descent line their is a palpable anticipation of the cheerful sunlight in the coral garden.

On our second dive we explore the Promenade deck. It is sobering to think of the 5,000 men that struggled over

Continued on page 64

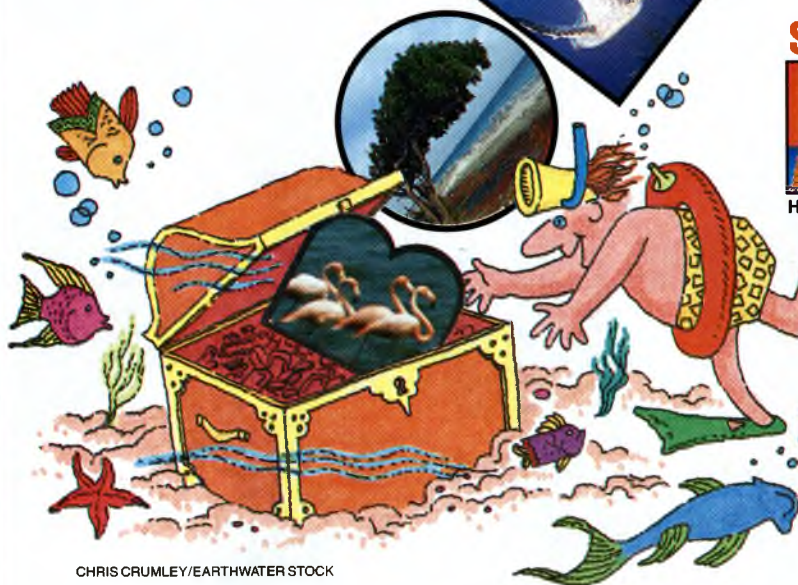
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Ocean Eye



DIVERS AND DOLPHIN, BAHAMAS

Nikon F3, 16mm, f11, Kodachrome 64

PROFILE: AMOS NACHOUM



Amos Nachoum has led National Geographic expeditions with Dr. Eugenie Clark and Dr. Silvia Earle, co-produced documentaries with Stan Waterman and helped organize trips for the Cousteau Society. In the business of diving and adventure travel, it doesn't get much more ground-floor than that.

His photos have appeared in most of the diving and travel magazines, as well as *The Living Ocean* and *The World Nature*. He won first place in the Communication Arts annual photo competition in 1993, and Nikon's International Underwater Photo Contest in 1988. He has appeared on *The Today Show* and *Good Morning America* and has been profiled in such diverse publications as *People*, *Esquire*, *Money* and *Entrepreneur*. He is currently working on a five-year project called "Predators, Mammals and US™"—teaching photography in the field and documenting the world's threatened populations of whales, sharks and dolphins. Nachoum is a recognized authority on adventure travel and diving, but when you talk to him you begin to understand that the reason is something more subtle than his impressive list of credentials; it is his sincere and enduring love of the ocean and its creatures.

Ocean Eye

**RIGHT: FEEDING LIONS,
NGOROGORO CRATER**

Nikon F3, 20mm, 1/250, f16, Velvia

**BELOW: SOFT CORALS,
GORDON REEF, RED SEA**

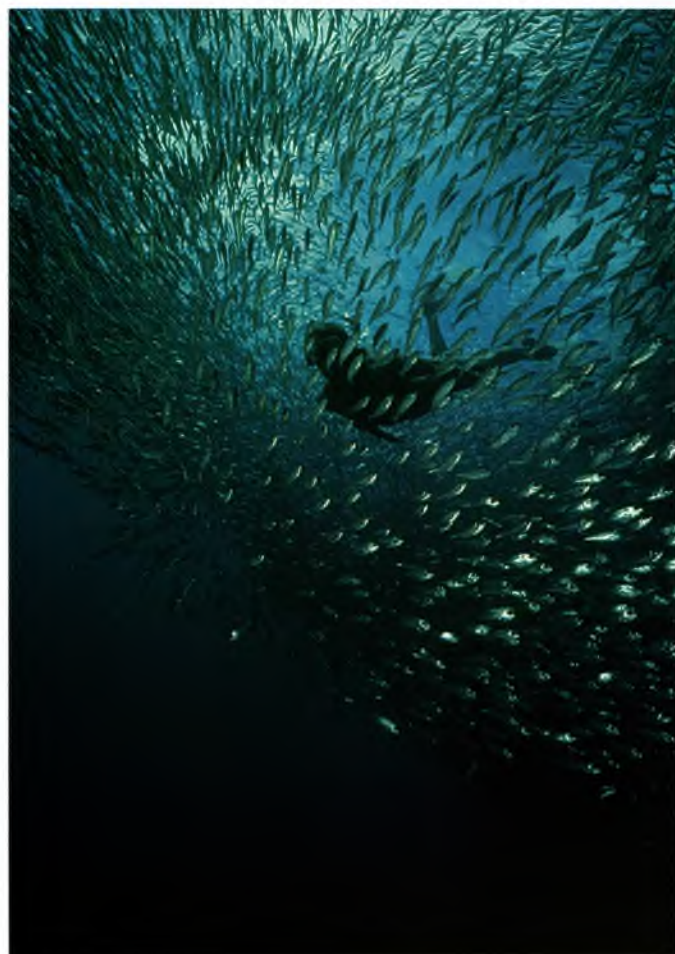
Nikon F3, 1/60, f11, Kodachrome 64





ABOVE: NET FISHERMAN, YAP

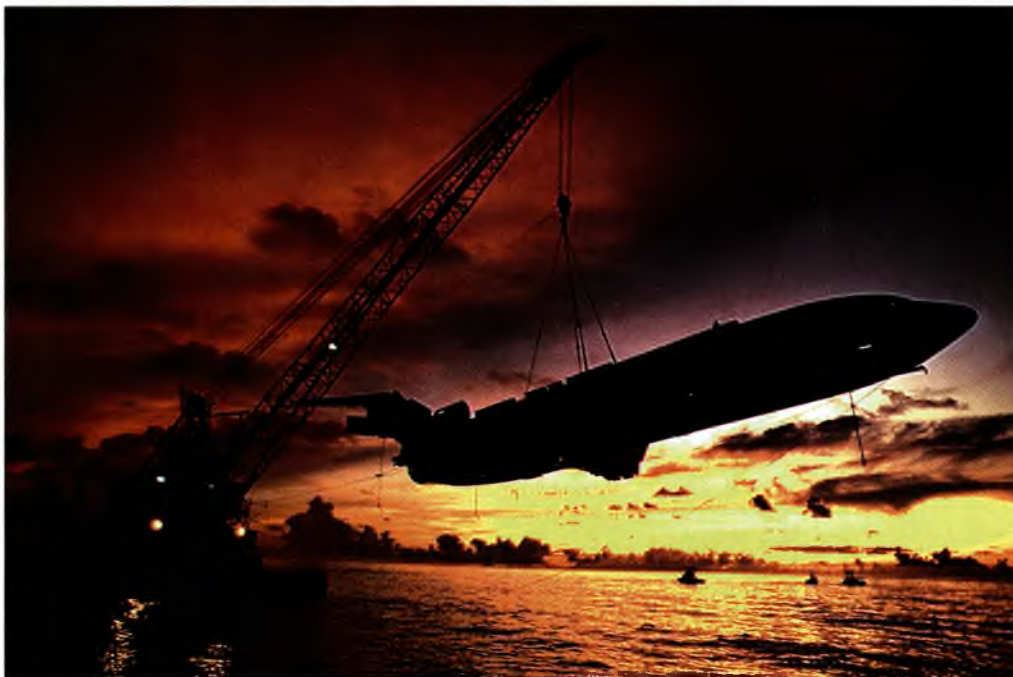
Nikon F3, 1/8, f11, Velvia



**LEFT: SNORKELER,
TOWN PIER, BONAIRE**

Nikonos, 15mm, 1/60, f 5.6, Kodachrome 64

Ocean Eye

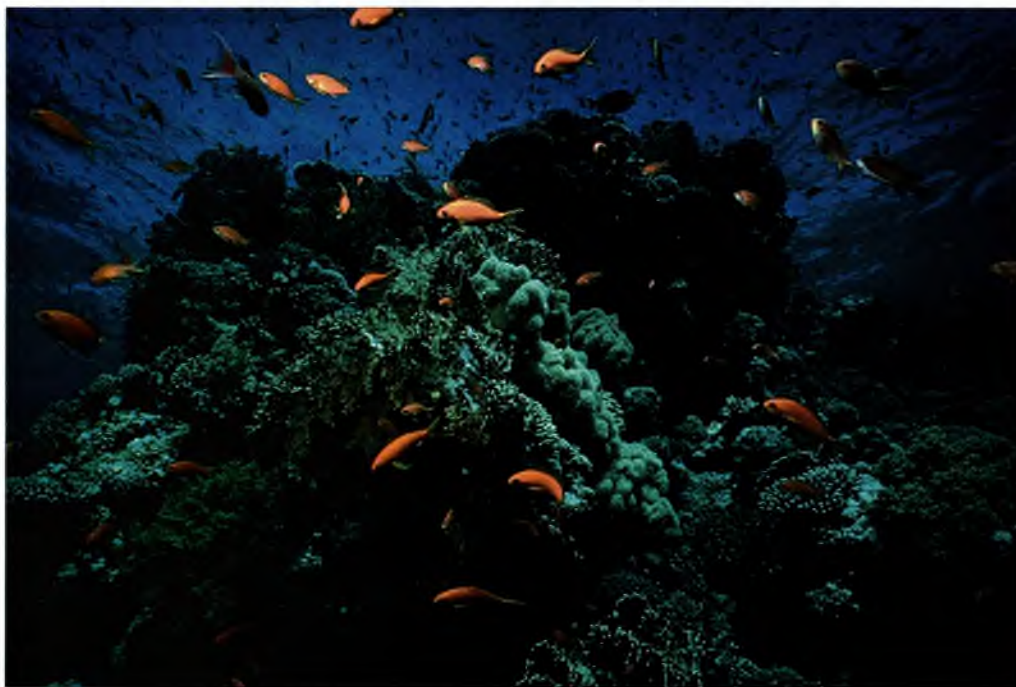


ABOVE: DERELICT AIRLINER/ARTIFICIAL REEF, FLORIDA

Nikon F3, 20mm, 1/15, f4, Velvia

BELOW: ANTHIAS, RED SEA

Nikon F3, 15mm, 1/60, f16, Kodachrome 64



BELOW: DIVER, DIAMOND ROCK, SABA

Nikon F3, 16mm, 1/60, f16, Kodachrome



Ocean Eye

**RIGHT: LIVE-ABOARD
DIVERS, BELIZE**

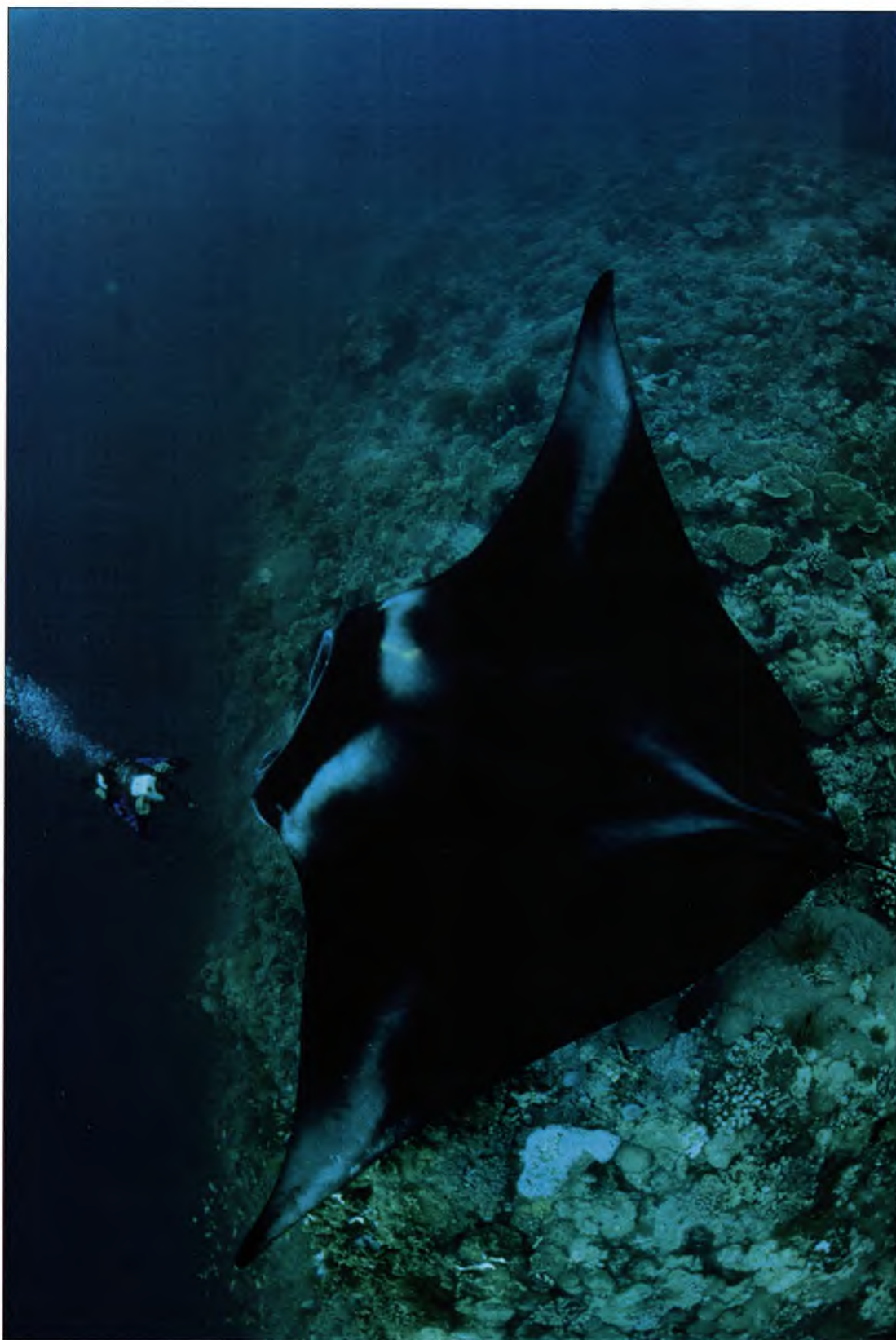
Nikon F3, 16mm, 1/25, f16, Velvia



**BELOW: OVER THE VOLCANO
KILUEA, HAWAII**

Nikon F4, 50mm, 1/250, f5.6





ABOVE: GIANT MANTA, PEMBA, ZANZIBAR

Nikon F3, 16mm, 1/25, f8,

THE CAYMAN

BY ELLEN SARBONE

There's a certain excitement about the Cayman Islands and I felt it immediately when I looked out the window of my Cayman Airways flight and watched the descent toward the shimmering, translucent turquoise waters surrounding Grand Cayman. This would be home for a mere week—fabulous reefs and walls that have been at home here for millennia.

Formalities to enter the Caymans were brief and polite, only a passport or other proof of citizenship is needed. Within a few minutes I was in a Charlie's Super Tours van as Charlie himself whisked me to Sunset House and gave me an overview of the three Cayman Islands. The Caymans are a British Crown Colony about 480 miles southwest of Florida, and 150 miles southeast of Cuba. The islands are the tops of an ancient undersea mountain chain. They're not volcanic, but a combination of coral and limestone rock known as "ironshore."

Grand Cayman is the most developed, largest island at about 76 square miles, and most populous with about 25,000 people. The sister islands, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, are 89 miles to the northeast.

Cayman Brac is a mere 14 square miles and hosts a population of less than 2,000. Little Cayman is only 10 square miles. Its permanent population was only 25 until last year. It's about 40 now.

Each island has its own unique personality, yet all offer such a variety of dive sites and sheer underwater excitement that many divers return yearly. excellent dive sites are only a short trip, 10 to 20 minutes, from any point of departure. The Cayman government is actively involved in preservation of its underwater legacy, establishing



Ames No/Room

COLLECTION



marine parks, no-diving areas and regulations on fishing in replenishment zones. All dive sites have moorings which have helped to bring the reefs back from the heavy toll of anchor damage incurred during the 1980's.

Numbers and varieties of fish and invertebrates, breathtaking walls and passing pelagics are the main draw. All three islands feature narc-inducing walls that drop off precipitously to deep canyons. Grand Cayman's start at 60-80 feet, Cayman Brac's start at 40-60 feet, and those near Little Cayman start at 20-40 feet.

Some Cayman reefs have black coral forests and a riot of orange elephant ear sponges. Others multitudes of sea fans and gorgonians, colorful bright yellow tube sponges and huge barrel sponges that could easily hold two people.

You can expect to see huge schools of fish on any dive—silversides, goatfish, jacks, snapper, grunts, even tarpon. french and gray angels, queen triggers, cowfish, filefish and blennies are also plentiful. Occasional include rays, sharks and turtles. Cayman Islands Watersports Operators Association (CIWOA) has instituted a 100-foot maximum depth. The second dive is



Ellen Sarbone

usually 50 feet maximum. Dive gloves are banned and buoyancy control is *de rigueur*, so practice, practice, practice. By the time I left I was so spoiled by the bath-warm 80-85 degree water and startling clarity that I never want to dive at home in California.



Ellen Sarbone

GRAND CAYMAN

was home to the first live-aboard dive boat and many still dock here, for good reason. There are over 120 dive sites ranging from steep walls to what may be the best shallow dive in the world—Stingray City, at 12 feet.

Settled by the British in 1734 the Caymans early economy was based on Mahogany export, but the islands were isolated for the most part. The first wireless station in 1935 broke the island's isolation, but real growth only began when the airport opened in 1954. The banking and tourism industries were developed during the 1960's. Today George Town is one of the world's largest offshore financial centers.

Divers can find accommodations to suit any budget. Grand Cayman has many independent dive operators and hotels from large chains and condos on Seven-Mile Beach on the island's west side, to secluded operations on the remote East End. I was surprised to see so many dive boats at each site, yet I didn't encounter many divers underwater.

Grand Cayman is shaped like a fish hook lying on its side. George Town in the west, just above the bend in the hook. Most of the diving and the greatest variety of marine life is along this west side. Sites along the west wall include Big Tunnels, Trinity Caves and Orange Canyon where the drop offs display their most colorful sea fans and gorgonians, orange elephant ear sponges and black coral. I saw schools of horse-eye jacks and tarpon, cruising spotted eagle ray, elegant

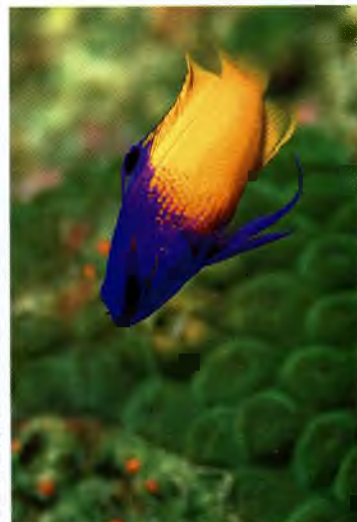
queen triggerfish and my logbook lists too many other species to mention. The many cuts and swim-throughs yield more of Caymans hidden treasures—lobsters, banded coral shrimp, golden coneys, scorpionfish, neon tube tunicates. Even shallower dives like Aquarium and Pageant Beach Reef boast a proliferation of marine life.

There's plenty of excellent, easily accessible shore diving on the westside, too. The many caverns at Devil's Grotto often have light streaming through their openings and are great for photographing the abundant schools of Silversides. Parrots Reef ranges from 20 to 40 feet. Plentiful sea fans, tube sponges, barrel sponges and coral support schools of french grunts, parrotfish and yellowtail snapper.

Northside underwater attractions include wall sites like Tarpon Alley, Lemon Drop Off, Ghost Mountain, and

Stingray City.

Outstanding sites on the East End and South Wall include Cinderella's Castle, Three Sisters, Lighthouse Wall, Tunnels of Love, and Wreck of the Ten Sails where, one hundred years ago, a fleet of ships misread warning signals and was destroyed. According to legend, not a life was lost because the good citizens of Grand Cayman braved the storm to save passengers and cargo. Because of this heroism,



Shari Westmeland





Amos Nachoum

the Caymans received tax-free status.

You needn't be a diver to enjoy a stay in the Caymans. Grand Cayman keeps non-diving folks busy with visits to the Turtle Farm on the northwest coast, prowling George Town, the national museum in the historic old courts building, shopping and just relaxing in the many charming cafes. There's even a cinema if you're sunburned or simply seeking a cool place to rest. A sight-seeing tour is always popular and worthwhile. Rent a car to explore the new botanical garden on Frank Sound Road on your way to deserted beaches around the east and north coasts. Atlantis Submarines takes non-divers for a tour of the reefs, and divers will thrill to an 800 foot descent in a two-passenger sub. You can even send a postcard home from hell, or at least something that looks like it. It's really a large outcropping of the

ironshore that looks like it could have come up from the inferno.

Evening entertainment is provided by a plethora of restaurants, clubs and night spots in George Town and Seven Mile Beach—including a duplicate bridge club and weekly square dance.

June is Million Dollar Month in Cayman. Named for the rich prizes awarded to winners of the famous international fishing tournament. Other dates to keep in mind are Carnival, around Easter, and Pirates Week at the end of October. A special diving event, Cayman Madness, runs from September 8, to October 22. An 8-day/7-night package starting at \$799 including hotel, diving, and air is available from Cayman Airways gateway. It's sponsored by Bob Soto's Diving, Ltd. and Caribbean Dive Tours. Ecology-minded divers will also be interested in a new PADI course, Underwater Naturalist, offered by Hyatt and Red Sail Sports.



Ellen Sarbone

CAYMAN BRAC,

larger of the two sister islands, is treasured by divers who find Grand Cayman a little too busy. I flew there Island Air, the new airline providing connections between the three islands. As we approached the airstrip, I could see reefs beckoning below the clear shimmering sea. I was ready to grab my mask and fins and jump right out. Fortunately, they were packed in my suitcase so I had to wait until we landed.

Days on The Brac are paradise, in or out of the water. A

warm, friendly and close-knit community in concert with calm, aquamarine waters lapping at sandy beaches perfect for shore dives and sunbathing. Most of Brac's excellent sites are only a short boat ride away. Columbus discovered Cayman Brac on his fourth voyage and called it Las Tortugas because of the many turtles. These days it is known by the name of the rugged bluff rising 140 feet from the sea. The island's early economy was based on turtling, then on boat building. Good, fertile land fostered agriculture and cattle ranching.

YOU CAN EVEN SEND A POSTCARD HOME FROM HELL, OR AT LEAST SOMETHING THAT LOOKS LIKE IT.

The Brac has two hotels with dive operations—Divi Tiara Beach Resort and Brac Reef Beach Resort. There are also several condos, time shares, and guest houses. Divi Tiara's dive operation is home to the Nikonos Shootout each July.

Brac diving is as good as it gets. There are at least 20 terrific wall dives starting at 40-60 feet. Cemetery Wall, Rock Monster at Chimney Wall, and Manta Canyon to name just a few. They all have deep cuts and tunnels emptying out on the drop offs. Turtles and pelagics are often spotted here. There are three wrecks and another 30 shallower dives amid Tongue and Groove reefs teeming with fish and invertebrates. These include Charlie's Reef, Grunt Valley, Elkhorn Forest, and Shark Alley.

Nature lovers have a wealth of onshore activities to keep them busy on Cayman Brac as well. These include hiking and exploring the fascinating limestone bluffs with many mysterious caves where pirates are said to have left hidden treasures. The Brac is on a flyway for migrating birds and has several endemic species. My charming unofficial guide, Mr. Platt, a volunteer with the National Trust, showed me all the new trails and park facilities that are going in, and I added several new birds to my list, including the Cayman Parrot. Brac features great bicycling, shelling, and some interesting Brackers in places like Edd's Place and La Esperanza Restaurant.

LITTLE CAYMAN

is home to approximately 40 residents all of whom are dedicated to diving activities and preserving their pristine environmental heritage. It's a low-lying island. A naturalist's haven covered with by tangles of Mangroves and thick bush right up to the water's edge, except for the fringe of long, powdery-soft sand beaches.

The name Little Cayman has long been synonymous with Bloody Bay Wall, a mecca for serious divers. A 10-



CRUZIN' FOR A BRUSIN'

by Gerard and Cindy Braud

Because it is an Island, nearly everything of value still arrives in Cayman on ships. Containerized vessels unload at the cargo dock in George Town Harbor. Cruise ships wait offshore with another valuable commodity, tourists.

On Cayman there is an ongoing battle over whether a pier should be built for visiting cruise ships. Currently these huge floating hotels anchor in a designated zone just off George Town. Tenders then ferry the tourists from the ship to a Port Authority dock.

Merchants and politicians have suggested constructing a cruise ship dock in George Town Harbor, since it already has a deep channel. Merchants feel it would give tourists more time on the island for shopping. It is estimated that the average tourist can lose up to two hours of shopping time waiting for tenders to arrive from shore to ferry them to the island and back.

But operating tenders to ferry tourists to and from the cruise ships is a big business in Cayman and the tender operators don't want to forfeit their slice of the tourism pie, and don't want a George Town cruise ship terminal.

Members of the Cayman Island Water Sports Operators Association have suggested that mooring buoys be anchored in the harbor, on to which cruise ships could tie up. At present each cruise ship drops anchor, causing constant damage to a reef that by all accounts has been virtually destroyed.

"The local gossip is suggesting they are going to put moorings in George Town by August," says former CIWSO president Adrian Briggs.

While permanent buoys near George Town would prevent the damage done by cruise ship anchors, they won't solve all the environmental problems created by cruise ships—namely garbage and sewage.

"Because they don't have a dock there is no way to dump the garbage. The boat may be loaded down from the last port, whether it's Cozumel or Jamaica," says Ronnie Foster of Indies Divers. "The Department of Natural Resources sends divers under the cruise ships to look for illegal dumping of sewage and bilge, as well as garbage," Foster says. "And they've issued fines to several cruise

Continued on page 67



minute flight from Cayman Brac dropped me right at the jeep that drove me across the airstrip and to the lodge, just 5 minutes away. From the lodge I boarded a truck for transfer to the dive boat. Nearly everything on the island is transported by truck. Mike, our very professional instructor and guide, regaled us with Little Cayman tales and gossip and made sure each of us had a buddy. One giant stride, and there I was, in the warm waters, descending down Great Wall West, admiring huge yellow and brown tube sponges growing on brilliant red barrel sponges hanging off the wall. My buddy pointed to his depth gauge—100 feet already! But that's the magic of diving in Cayman—time simply melts away.

It is difficult to describe the awesome diving, both deep and shallow on Little Cayman. Shallower dives like Mixing Bowl, at the juncton of Bloody Bay Wall and Jackson's Wall on the northwest coast, or Paul's Anchor, and Meadows are just as exciting in their way as deeper dives at Bloody Bay Wall sites like Lea's Lookout and Great Wall, or those on Jackson's Bay Wall like Mike's Mountains, and Blacktip Boulevard.

A sandy bottom (itself full of fascinating creatures) leads up to either a tongue and groove reef system in the shallower areas, or caverns and tunnels emptying out on the walls. Here it is common to see turtles lumbering toward you, large eagle rays and dolphins cruising by. Fish with all the hues of the rainbow sweep by everywhere. My only disappointment was that I didn't get to meet Molly, the Manta, who often visits divers in this area.

The fresh water Pirates Well was just rediscovered last April after years of searching. Dive trips are soon to be conducted in the caverns branching off it, promising more exciting diving to add to the Little Cayman repertoire.

A few days Little Cayman are all too brief. In addition to spectacular diving there are plenty of other activities including visits to nearby uninhabited Owen Island, snorkeling trips, birdwatching, bicycling, and chatting with other guests and the friendly locals like friendly and very informative Little Cayman District Officer, Bruce Eldemire.

Little Cayman is one of the finest spots in the world for bonefishing and has a landlocked lake full of tarpon. A birdwatcher's paradise, newly-declared Governor Gore Bird



Ellen Sarbone

Sanctuary has the largest colony of red-footed boobies in the western hemisphere. I saw endangered whistling ducks, brown boobies, magnificent frigatebirds, black-necked stilts and others species too numerous to list. There are many hiking trails—a showcase for Indigenous flora and fauna—orchids and large Iguanas can be admired on a leisurely stroll.

Sunsets on Little Cayman are unequalled anywhere. Suddenly the blood red sun is bidding us adieu and reminding us of our place in the greater scheme of things. Another perspective of the stressful world we usually inhabit can be seen from the shores of Little Cayman. I recommend that you get there soon.



Ellen Sarbone

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A REEF

by Gerard and Cindy Braud

While the Cayman islands continues to develop in popularity as a Caribbean playground of the rich and powerful, so do the number of resorts that service the growing tourism industry. One of the groups trying to preserve the island's natural beauty is the Cayman Island Water Sports Operators Association, an organization committed to conservation, education and tourism marketing. It is not always an easy task to strike a balance between business and environmental interests, but the organization is aware that most visitors come to Cayman because of its natural beauty.

To divers and dive operators one of the most precious natural resources are the surrounding reefs. The reefs surrounding Grand Cayman support more than 1,000 species of fish, plants and animals and nearly all of these animals are interdependent, existing in delicate balance.

Cayman has been a pioneer in tough environmental laws to protect its fragile marine environment. Three different types of underwater zones have been established. Environmental zones have been designated as refuges for marine life. Fishing is off limits here year round. Anchoring here is prohibited and so is everything from snorkeling to water skiing. In Replenishment zones conch and lobster are off limits year round, although local fishermen are allowed to fish with lines. Marine Park zones control fishing and no marine life can be taken on SCUBA. Spear fishing is prohibited in Marine Parks as is the importation of spear guns into Cayman although the limited use of spear guns is allowed in some areas with a license from the Marine Conservation Board.

The Department of Natural Resources enforces the laws in protected zones with regular patrols and stiff penalties. Maximum fines can reach \$5,000 and one year in jail. If you are convicted of breaking the environmental protection laws in Cayman you might forfeit your diving gear and your boat.

"I think the management and environmental zones are one of the best things the Cayman government has ever

Continued on page 69





SOJOURN IN THE **SOLOMONS**

Story and Photos by Robert Aston

Awash in the

warm equatorial South Pacific waters off the eastern coast of New Guinea is the archipelago of the Solomons. This chain of islands has long been legendary for its fierce headhunting tribes, and, as a result, the islands have remained relatively isolated until fairly recently. For traveling divers that means unspoiled pristine diving adventures in areas that are virtually untouched.



World War II marks the peak of the world's interest in the Solomons, when their strategic position was valued by both sides. Like most of the islands of the South Pacific, these are strewn with the relics and rusting machines of war. Military airstrips dot many islands and sunken vessels and other war debris litter the waters. But this sunken war junk now makes one of the world's most extensive artificial reefs, providing many adventures for the diver and underwater photographer. Most of the accessible wrecks have become underwater sanctuaries, encrusted with colorful growths and home to a diverse community of marine life.

Because of the Solomons' isolation land-based resort diving has only begun to develop, but the existing operations are excellent. There are only six dive operations in the Solomons, as yet. Dive Solomons runs three locations—two in Honiara, and one at the Gizo Hotel in the Western Province. They feature some spectacular wreck diving including planes, submarines, troop carriers and transports, as well as reefs, walls and caves. Group and

package plans including diving and accommodations are available in any of their locations.

Adventure Sports, also in the town of Gizo, was established six years ago by Danny and Karrie Kennedy. Island Dive Services at the Mendana Hotel in Honiara has the most complete dive shop in the Solomons. Diving is also available at two other locations in the Western Province—on the islands of Munda with Solomon Sea at Agnes

Lodge, and at the Uepi Resort.

Probably the best known dive operations in the Solomons are live-aboards, and Bilikiki Cruises is probably the best known of them. Bilikiki provides excursions on a luxury live-aboard with door-to-door service from the Mendana Hotel in Honiara. With only three-weeks to visit, we decided to dive with the crew of the Bilikiki and with land-based operations in the Western Province.

Other divers who ventured into this primitive part of the world have brought back fabulous stories of the diving from the Bilikiki. It was difficult to imagine anything that could surpass the superb diving of Truk and Palau, but returning divers were every bit as adjective-infected as those who'd experienced the magic of Micronesia. I was excited to taste the best of the South Pacific diving. With cameras in hand, we began our search for those huge soft corals, giant fans and legendary fish.



Bilikiki Cruises began operating in the waters off Honiara on Guadalcanal several years ago. Since most of the islands were difficult to get to and

lacked diving facilities at that time, Bilikiki provided an easy way for divers to reach untouched sites with all the conveniences of home. Diving from these luxury live-aboard vessels has become so popular that additional ships have been added to the cruise line including the one we dove from ourselves on, *Spirit*.

This 26-passenger air-conditioned luxury vessel has a crew of 11 and will sail with as little as 10 guests. On our trip there were only 12 guests to enjoy the personal attention of the dive staff and the spacious rooms, private baths and luxury appointments. Sailing with a light guest list allowed the staff the luxury of exploring uncharted dive locations. It was an exciting prospect, although no one could tell how the diving would be since most of the dive sites in the Florida Island Group are unexplored.

Even though the headhunting days are over, it's a good idea to get permission from the natives to dive off their untouched islands. Having secured it, we descended to find sheer walls adorned with enormous gorgonian fans, nudibranchs, clownfish, lionfish, Maori wrasse and surgeonfish—an unbelievable profusion of marine life. At the end of a full day of spectacular diving we returned to the boat to gaze at the brilliant sunsets off the stern of the *Spirit* and let the warm pleasures of live-aboard living settle into our souls.

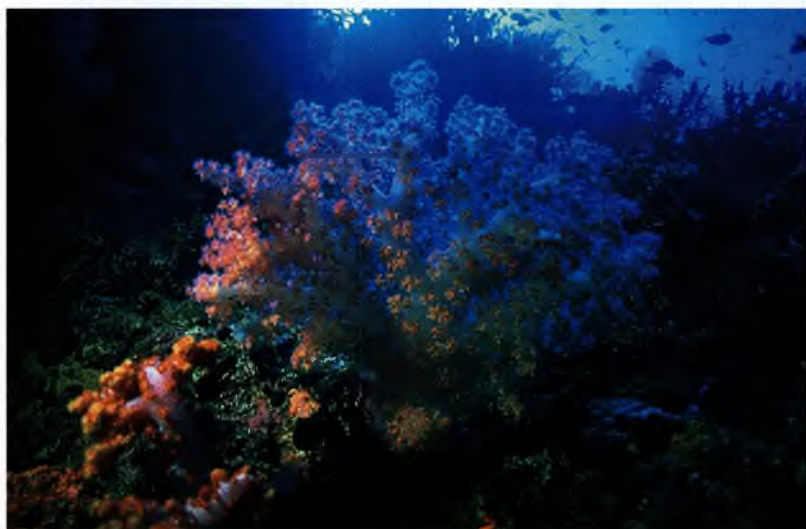
Live-aboard boats occupy a well-established niche in the Solomons, but a growing reputation for its fabulous unspoiled diving, coupled with the many airstrips left by the war, especially in the Western Province, make these islands a natural for land-based diving, and enterprising operators are beginning to step in and fill the gap. From the centrally located international airport near Honiara, on the island of Guadalcanal, you can catch connecting flights south to the provinces of Makira and Temotu, or north to Malaita. The Western Province, located

just off the coast of New Guinea, 5° south of the Equator, offers some of the very best diving and is in the process of developing three land-based diving destinations—three unique opportunities to experience the adventure available on these islands lost in time.

We boarded one of Solomon Airline's inter-island Twin Otters for the hop across several palm-carpeted islands to Gizo. The last of these is Gizo's principal airport—the entire island barely big enough for this sea-level grass-strip runway. The locals call the island “the aircraft carrier”. The plane came to rest within inches of the end of the runway (and the island's edge) where Danny and Kerrie Kennedy of Adventure Sports were on hand to greet us and take us by boat to the mainland.

Exploring the waters around Gizo includes visits to many war relics such as sunken Hellcat and Corsair

American fighter planes, a Japanese Zero and several sunken freighters. The largest of these is the *Toa Maru*—a



450-foot transport ship that contains many fascinating World War II artifacts that Danny has tucked away in secret crevices. Kennedy knows these waters well, and his is the oldest dive operation in the area. He can guide you to many steep drop-offs, and exciting pinnacles, as well as the hidden treasures from lost ships.

The next stop in our whirlwind tour was Munda and diving with David and Mariana of Solomon Sea Divers.

SSD offers a very personal and unique type of diving. There are many wall dives in the Solomons, but SSD's dive along Coral Corner is one of the most radical—rivaling the best walls anywhere in the world—including Palau. Many of the Solomons' walls feature 2,000-foot plus drops with severe undercuts. Surrounded by throngs of glimmering fish, we swam past large fans and soft corals that adorn these majestic walls.

Along Rainbow Passage off Tomba Tuni, known locally as the Mushroom Island, we were treated to the appearance of a large school of barracuda. Not only was it a large school, but the individual fish were very large. Although diver attacks by schooling barracuda are unheard of, my buddy was still







reluctant to swim within the swirling mass of these spike-toothed prowling predators. Discretion won the day and we let the barracuda disappear into the blue from which they'd come.

Our next stop was Uepi Island Resort and we were totally unprepared for the beauty awaiting us. This island will fulfill every vision you've ever imagined of a South Pacific paradise. The airport is at the lower end of New Georgia and is also grass like the one at Gizo (this one a bit bigger). Our boatman informed us the island resort was a 30 minute ride across Marovo Lagoon. About 45 minutes later we were still bumping across the lagoon when Uepi Island Resort came into sight. On island time, it seems, everywhere is 30 minutes by boat, but the warmth of the reception makes it well worth the wait, no matter how long it takes.

The Marovo Lagoon is so large it is called the Eighth Wonder of the World. It runs for 30 miles and is protected from the New Georgia Sound by a series of fringing islands with few passages between. The resort is located on one of these passages providing

excellent access to the diving of New Georgia Sound.

After we'd settled in to our private bungalow at the end of a long and flower-laden path, we put in some hammock time between a pair of stately palms and admired another spectacular Solomons' sunset. When hunger



finally roused us from our reveries we joined the other guests for an incredible spread of lobster, coconut crab and other island delicacies—the best food we enjoyed in all our Solomon travels.

The waters of New Georgia Sound are home to an abundance of pelagic life and that's exactly what we were after on our next dive. At a site called the Elbow, we found as many as twenty hammerhead sharks; in Landaro Gardens, we were greeted by schools of

circling devil rays. We needn't have worried about being disappointed in our search for devil rays, hammerheads and turtles, as it turned out, our hostess Suzanne had to stop feeding her pet sharks from the dock—the guests were being chased from the water on their afternoon swim.

In a destination as exotic as the Solomons, of course, diving isn't the only entertainment available. The Solomons offer a unique experience of islands, turquoise sea and friendly people. A trip to Skull Island to see the ancestral bones that protect the islanders is well worth the trouble. Permission must be granted by the Chief. It usually isn't a problem, but remember, don't touch. I'm not sure what the consequences would be, but those rows of skulls don't exactly inspire confidence.

The islanders are well known for their wood carvings and on our last day in the Solomons we set off to Telina Village, home of some of the best carvers in the Islands—a 30-minute (really an hour) ride by fast boat from Uepi Island. Telina village is home to

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THE BAY ISLANDS

BEATITUDES

BY
JOHN NEWMAN
PHOTOS BY
F. STUART
WESTMORLAND

THERE are divers who have become completely blasé to the kind of diving you or I might consider adventure. These submarine sophisticates are looking for exotic thrills: observing the breeding ritual of white sharks, midwifing a humpback whale, discovering the underwater burial ground of the coelacanth. They are a peculiar breed of the saltwater effete in a contest of marine one-up-man-ship with their fellow divers looking down their state-of-the-art regulators at those poor slobs on a resort vacation grinning from ear to ear over the first clown fish they find hovering over its anemone.

You've probably overheard them on the dive boat:

"Cayman? Oh, I used to go there, years ago."

"Sipadan? Oh yeah, it's okay, I guess."

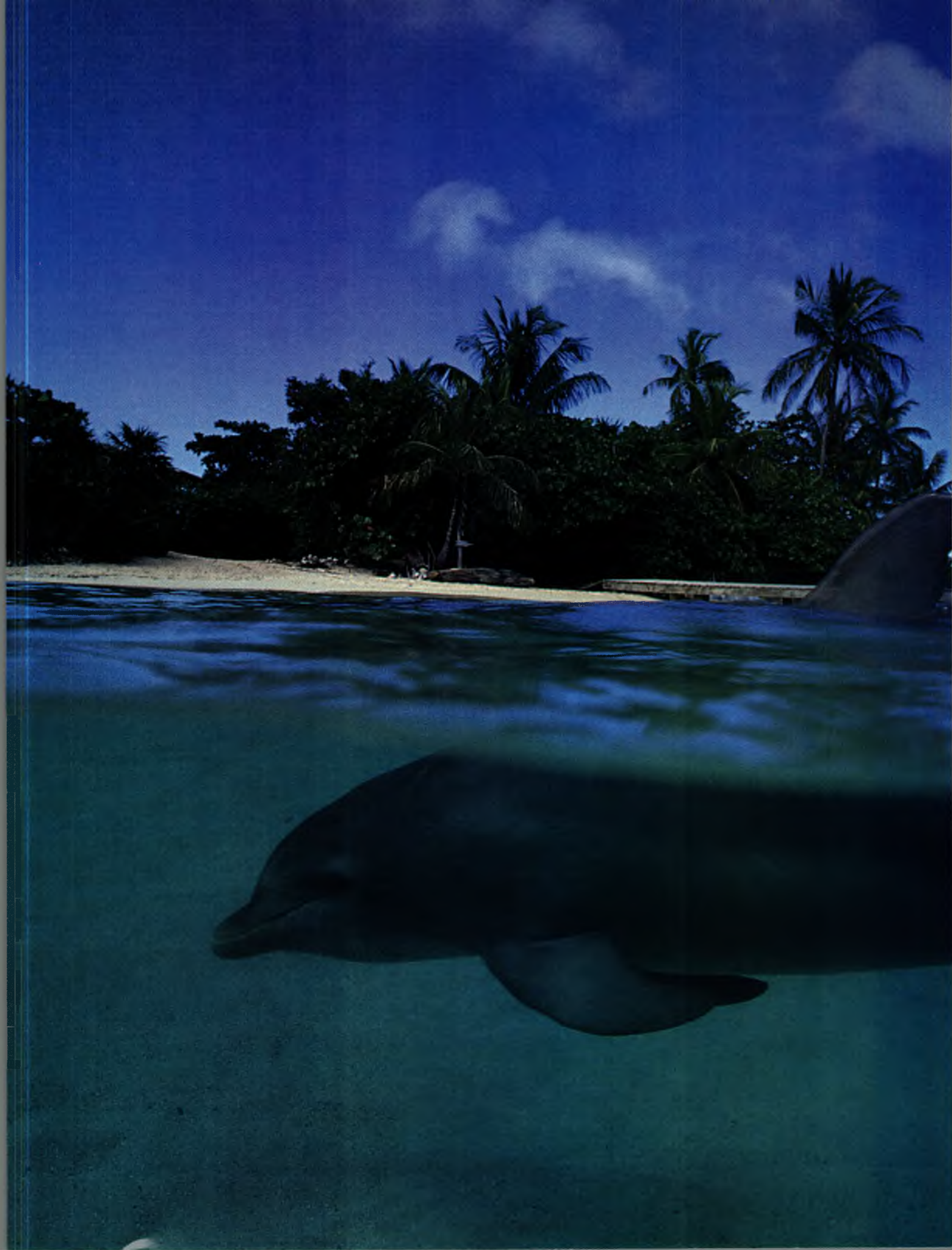
"There used to be a few amusing sites on the Great Barrier Reef."

Makes you wonder what anybody with such a severe case of scuba ennui is doing on your lowly dive boat in the first place. For the most part, these folks don't even condescend to dive in the Caribbean at all—with one notable exception; that exception is called the Bay Islands.



What makes the Bay Islands so attractive a destination is not strictly the diving—although that is as good, if not better, than any you will find in the Caribbean—but a unique, ineffable panache you will find nowhere else in the world. Something that can't help but please even the scuba snobs, though they'd never admit it.

It is not an easy quality to define. Certainly the geography is fortuitous. Ranging from 12 to 35 miles off the northern coast of Honduras, the Bay Islands are bathed in the warm, clear waters of the western Caribbean and the mild breath





THE MAGIC OF DIVING WITH DOLPHINS

BY JOHN NEWMAN

Nearly everyone who has dived with dolphins raves about the experience. There is something magic about it. It goes deeper than the dolphins engaging grin and cheerful chatter. There is more to it than the novelty of communicating with an alien species from a liquid world. It is awe-inspiring to dive with a whale shark or a manta, but it is enchantment to dive with a wild dolphin. It affects people. For some it is an experience bordering on the mystic. There are those who swear by its healing properties.

Whether or not swimming with dolphins has any effect on the pathology of diseases, I don't know. But I know the sense of intimate communication experienced with these creatures is on a very different order than teaching your dog to stay, having your cat come when it hears the electric can opener, or training your Umbrella Cockatoo to say "Let's Rock and Roll!"—even if it is in your own mother tongue.

However loving the slobber of Old Blue, it is the *Homo sapien* that holds all the cards in the human/pet interaction. When you interact with wild *cetaceans*, there is something else going on. Something that makes you begin to suspect after a while, if you're honest with yourself and *menschen* enough to stare it down, that you may be dealing here with an intellectual equal. And if you begin to accept the idea of dolphins as your intellectual equal, it is not particularly comfortable to compare the two species from a moral standpoint. Swim with them long enough and even more unsettling notions may begin to take root—maybe the anthropocentric world view of man as the flower of evolutionary progression is as ass-

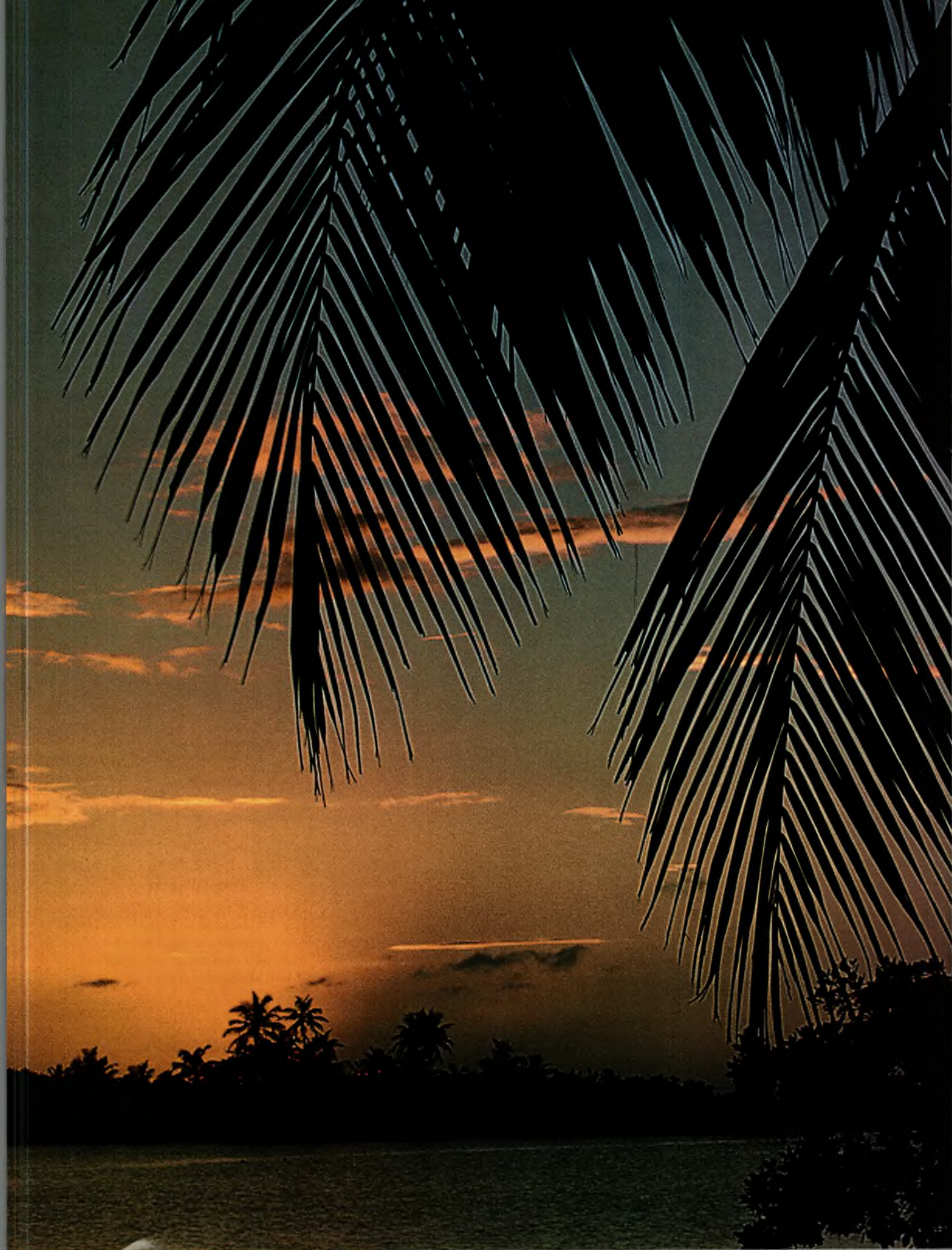
of the tropical trades. There are three major islands, three smaller ones, and a whole collection of lovely cays. The shoulders of every isle are mantled in a thick cloak of green, hemmed, in most places, by a ribbon of golden sand and fringed by a vibrant and diverse reef community.

In spite of their proximity to Central America and their political affiliation with Honduras, The Bay Islands are very much a part of the cultural potpourri of the Caribbean. The root stock of the islanders themselves is as diverse and colorful as the rainforest that blankets the slopes of their islands. Some can trace their family trees back to buccaneers who anchored out in quiet lagoons to await Spanish treasure galleons departing the New World. On a quiet night it's easy to imagine a black pirate ship anchored in the bay at Coxen's Hole (the capital of Roatan itself bears the name of a famous buccaneer), deck lanterns spreading their dim yellow glow on the riffing water and the sardonic grin of the jolly roger snapping in the warm breeze.

A sizeable portion of the island's populations are descended from escaped slaves, or rebellious slaves marooned here by the British colonial government of neighboring Belize (then British Honduras). Many of these people inter-married with the native Carib Indians who have inhabited the islands since before the time of Columbus. Most of these Black Caribs speak their own unique language in addition to the Creole English spoken throughout the islands. They also have preserved their ritual dances and arcane religious practices—another tribute to their dogged and irrepressible sense independence. Rounding out the social mix are the Spanish-speaking mestizo people from the Honduran main-land who bring their own distinctive latin flavor to the cultural mélange.

Typically the fringing reefs of the Bay Islands are cleft with coral canyons leading to a dramatic wall. Almost every one of the coral species present in the Caribbean is represented here including pillar, elkhorn, brain, star, fire coral and many more. In addition to the generous compliment of corals there is a whole rainbow of sponges in every shape and size. The character of these canyons varies from narrow channels completely capped by coral growth to wide abyssal gaps, on Roatan and Guanaja in particular they are present at nearly every site. In many areas it is a short swim from shore to a staggering drop-off and many of the





backwards as the Ptolemaic model of the solar system. Maybe you aren't intellectual equals after all. Maybe it is not the dolphins that suffer in the comparison.

Anthony's Key Resort in Roatan, Bay Islands, Honduras, can offer you this magical and humbling experience. AKR's dolphins are not wild in the strictest sense, but they aren't pets or side-show performers, either.

In association with IMS (Institute for Marine Science), AKR's Dolphin Discovery Program allows up to six snorkelers the chance to interact with four to six dolphins in a large bordered habitat on one end of Bailey's Key. The Dolphin Diver program gives six scuba divers at a time the opportunity to interact with the dolphins in open water. In both programs the dolphins come and go as they please. They aren't fed, or made to perform tricks.

AKR's programs allow the public a peek into the private lives of bottlenose dolphins. In addition to the snorkel and scuba programs, AKR's 12 animals are individually exercised every day in open water and are regularly rotated from the deep water pens at IMS to the huge lagoon enclosure next door at Bailey's Key.

All around the world dolphins are known to join swimmers and divers. The pods of spotted dolphins on the Little Bahama Bank are so dependable, a whole industry has grown up around transporting divers and snorkelers to the area. One of the things that makes these creatures so intriguing is that *they* appear to exhibit interest in interacting with us.

Fascination with our remarkable marine cousins is nothing new, of course. Many ancient civilizations revered dolphins as deities and nearly every sea-going culture has its legends of dolphins saving the lives of people at sea. Intelligent, warm-blooded, air-breathing mammals with a highly complex system of communication, there is a great deal about dolphins that is familiar to us, and just as much that is inscrutably alien.

Dolphins are superbly adapted to their aquatic environment. Their sleek hydrodynamic shape allows them to move through the water with astonishing speed and grace, and they are tireless swimmers. Although a dolphin's lungs are not particularly large, they are capable of holding their breath for as long as five minutes, with

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resorts have exploited this natural feature to make shore diving a specialty. Another characteristic feature of Bay Islands diving are the many offshore submarine pinnacles, known locally as seamounts—these islands beneath the surface host a hidden wealth of marine life.

Roatan is the largest and most populous of the Bay Islands, and, in spite of easy access by air and a very well-developed tourist infrastructure, has maintained a tranquil way of life free from the crush of tourists you will find in so many other Caribbean destinations. For divers, that means not only a relaxing topside respite, but submarine serenity in uncrowded dive sites.

Typically, the fringing reef around Roatan is very close to shore, particularly along the south coast where it is scattered with small islets and channels that provide access to a succession of lovely bays and harbors. The northern reef is farther from shore, heavier and interrupted in only a few places by channels. Both coasts offer spectacular diving nearly anywhere you enter the water.



*A tranquil
free from the
you will
other Carib*

Because the islanders rely on fishing the local waters for survival, edible species are not abundant near population centers. Blue tang, parrotfish and angelfish are most common, but other species increase in numbers away from heavily fished areas. Although they aren't common, whale sharks, manta rays and bull sharks are occasionals on both coasts.

Some of the most popular places on the south shore to get wet include Calvin's Crack—a long descent through a coral-capped chamber that delivers you to the wall at 70 feet. French Harbor Drop, Enchanted Forest, Valley of the Kings, and Mary's Place are some of the other popular south shore dives. Because of heavy diver impact, Mary's Place is no longer the site it once was, but its labyrinth of tunnels and channels still make it worth the time. Memorable north coast sites include Herbie's Fantasy—the odds-on favorite to spot mantas, morays and other denizens of interest, West End Wall, Halfmoon Bay and Bear's Den.

Guanaja is second on the list size-wise, though not necessarily in terms of diving thrills. Somewhat more mountainous than Roatan, Guanaja's steep slopes are thickly covered in a cascade of green down to its isolated white beaches. Several artesian springs that originate high in the mountains tumble down the cliffs creating picturesque waterfalls and providing drinking water for the island's inhabitants.

On Guanaja, the Bay Islands eclectic population mix is supplemented by a percentage of Paya Indians, descendants of the original inhabitants of the island. Most of the island's inhabitants live in Bonaca, the main village, and fish to make their living. Guanaja's surrounding reef formations are as dramatic as those of Roatan. In some places off the northern coast the spectacular drop-off begins in only 15 feet of water. Farther



and basket sponges. Farther south a trio of little islets known as the Pigeon Cays provide a perfect venue for a picnic and snorkeling in beautiful coral gardens.

Utila is the westernmost of the Bay Islands and boasts the same spectacular barrier and patch reefs—the Great Wall on Utila's east coast is one of the finest in the Bay Islands and Utila diving may offer your best chance of seeing whale sharks. Utila is a low limestone ridge sloping from 200-foot Pumpkin Hill in the northeast corner, to thick tangles of mangrove in the west. About 2,000 residents occupy Utila Settlement. All of them speak English, and most are very amiable and welcome visiting divers. Utila may be the least visited of the major islands and there are undoubtedly many great dive sites yet to be discovered.

Just 12 miles off mainland Honduras, the Cayos Cochinos (Hog Islands) take their name from the herds of pigs left here by buccaneers to provide fresh meat, and rumors still circulate about what else they may have left buried in chests. In spite of the unflattering name it is hard to imagine a more beautiful setting.

The Cochinos consist of two main islands, Cochino Grande and Cochino Piqueño and a handful of perfect smaller cays. The Cochinos are remote and undeveloped, but the diver willing to rough it will be rewarded with a memorable diving experience. Like the other islands it has spectacular wall diving—giant sponges, monumental formations of elkhorn coral, thick crowds of chromis and wrasse—all the standard Bay Islands underwater scenery.

The resorts in the Bay Islands compete vigorously for your travel dollars, but they



are wise enough to join together to protect and preserve the natural beauty of these unique islands. The Bay Islands Conservation Association (BICA) was founded by the marine biologists at Anthony's Key Resort. BICA's strategy is to employ islanders, whose sewage, fishing and hunting practices have degraded the reefs and dive environment, protecting and preserving the natural resources. The sincerity of their intentions is genuine, but dependency on tourist dollars encourages further growth that could threaten the very thing they are trying to protect and the character of island society. It is a difficult tightrope to walk and the jury is still out, but for now the beautiful Bay Islands are a dive travel treat that even the snobs can't pass up.

*way of life
crush of tourists
find in so many
beach destinations.*

offshore are numerous pinnacles, or sea-mounts. Inside the reef barrier are a plethora of bank and patch reefs. All of these locations host very fine diving. Some of the more popular north shore sites are The Bayman Drop, Black Rock Canyon and Pavillions.

A series of small palm-studded islets dot the reef on the south coast. Here you will find a number of popular sites that feature caverns, crevices and huge schools of silversides. Probably the best known is Jim's Silverlode—a great cavern and wall dive that doubles as an active feeding station. Also on the south coast you will find the Bay Islands best wreck dive, the Jado Trader, resting in about 90 feet of water and providing shelter for a large population of grouper.

Between Roatan and Guanaja is the lovely little island of Barbareta visited by dive operations from both of the two larger islands. The Barbareta Wall, on the south side of the island, is a continuous mile-long drop-off thick with barrel

It's BETTER IN Belize

STORY AND PHOTOS BY NORBERT WU



Philip startled me by suddenly cupping his hands over his mouth and grunting in loud gasps. I was even more surprised by the blood-curdling scream that came from overhead. I looked up, trying to locate whatever huge monster was descending from the treetops to devour me. I could see nothing but the tropical sun dappling the leaves of the thick rainforest canopy. Philip grunted again, even louder, and was answered in kind. He pointed out a black silhouette in the treetops and I caught my first glimpse of the famous black howler monkey of Belize, called baboons locally. Dominant male howlers bellow at each other as a way of establishing territory. Their calls carry across miles of forest.

Philip was my guide to the lowland forests of central Belize and it was turning out to be one of the most fascinating and eventful tours of my life. In a single day I had toured the ancient Mayan ruins of Lamanai, rode a river through a wilderness teeming with birds and wildlife and relaxed in the steaming saunas and hot tubs of a renowned jungle health spa. I was discovering the ecological diversity and ancient culture of this tiny Central American country for the first time, and finding that Belize is a destination featuring just about anything a traveler might desire: misty pine-covered mountains; half-buried Mayan ruins rising from the jungle floor; the blue Caribbean Sea and diverse and accessible wildlife.

Located just south of Mexico's Yucatan, Belize, one of Central America's smallest countries at about 9,000 square miles, paradoxically features a barrier reef second in size only to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. Formerly known as

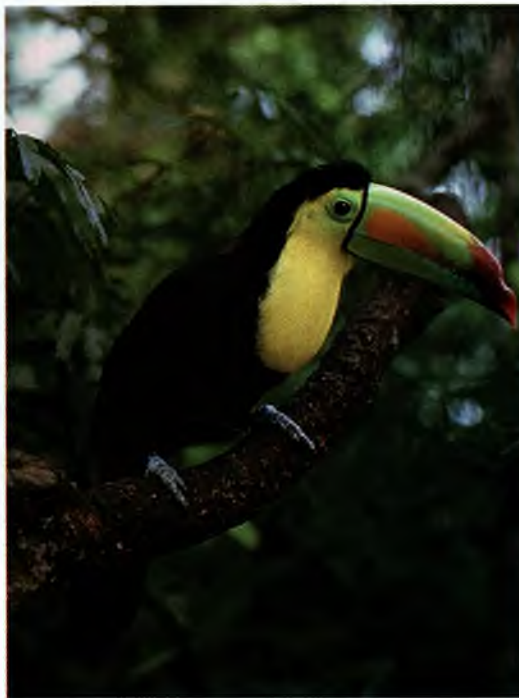
British Honduras, this gem in the western Caribbean became the independent nation of Belize in 1981. English is the official and primary language here, and American travelers will find it easy to get around. The climate is tropical, with distinct dry season (February through May), and wet season (June through January). Most of the country's 100 to 180 annual inches of rain falls, as you might expect, in the wet season. I visited Belize during the rainy season, and, even though rain fell periodically over two or three days, none of my activities were curtailed. In fact, my visit to the Belize

Zoo and Tropical Education Center was greatly enhanced. A mid-day rainfall cooled things down and encouraged the animals to come out of their shelters to stretch their legs and explore the grounds.

Belize is unique in Central America in that most of the country is still under forest cover and few places can match it in the diversity of its flora and fauna. Fortunately Belize is a country that knows the importance of its wildlife. It is a crossroads for species of temperate northern, and tropical southern latitudes. Here you will find 500 species of birds, 250 varieties of orchid and one of the last stands of the jaguar. The government and local volunteer groups have spearheaded one of the most progressive conservation efforts in Central America. Several wildlife sanctuaries have been set up, each with its own character, each

highlighting and protecting a particular animal and ecosystem.

The Community Baboon Sanctuary at Bermuda Landing is a good example. It was established in 1985 to protect one of the few healthy populations of black howler monkeys in Central America. The sanctuary is a voluntary grassroots organization. Eight villages and dozens of local landowners







have combined forces to protect the howlers and other endangered species. Farming practices have been developed respecting the needs of the monkeys. Forest along the riverbanks is left undisturbed, the howlers food trees (hog-plums and sopadillas) are left standing, and corridors of forest are maintained around the farmed areas.

A small natural history museum introduces visitors to the area. Any visitor who wishes one is assigned a guide who will lead them through the jungle trails and and point out the monkeys. The local people take a greast deal of pride in their conservation ethic and its accomplishments.

Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, below the peaks of the Maya Mountains in southern Belize, is another example of the country's commitment to conservation. The area is one of the last preserves of the free-ranging jaguar, as well other cats such as the jaguarundi, ocelot and puma. Almost 300 species of birds are protected here, including the scarlet macaw, keel-billed toucan and king vulture. A consortium of producers just completed a major film on high-definition television about the jaguar there, a tribute to the fact that the sanctuary has the highest density of jaguar in the world.

Although Cockscomb Basin has a good population of jaguars and other cats, they are rarely seen except by dedicated naturalists. For a tourist who can't spend the time stalking elusive and secretive rainforest animals, the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center provides an easy, informative, and conservation-minded look at Belize's native wildlife. The Belize Zoo is the only place in the country, maybe the world, to see rainforest wildlife close up. Nearly every major animal of the rainforest can be found here, in natural and spacious enclosures. It is a peaceful place with informative signs that tell visitors about the animals and their importance in the world. I was

particularly taken by a sign, created by the students of St. Johns College, relating tapir myths. It described some of the common misconceptions about this fascinating creature in both English and Creole.

Tapir Myths—Mountain Cow

1. *Could skin wah dog live wid e trunk.* (Can skin a dog alive with its trunk.)

2. *Can't ben e front leg.* (Can't bend its front legs.)

3. *If you eat e meat, speckle yu.* (If you eat its meat, it speckles you.)

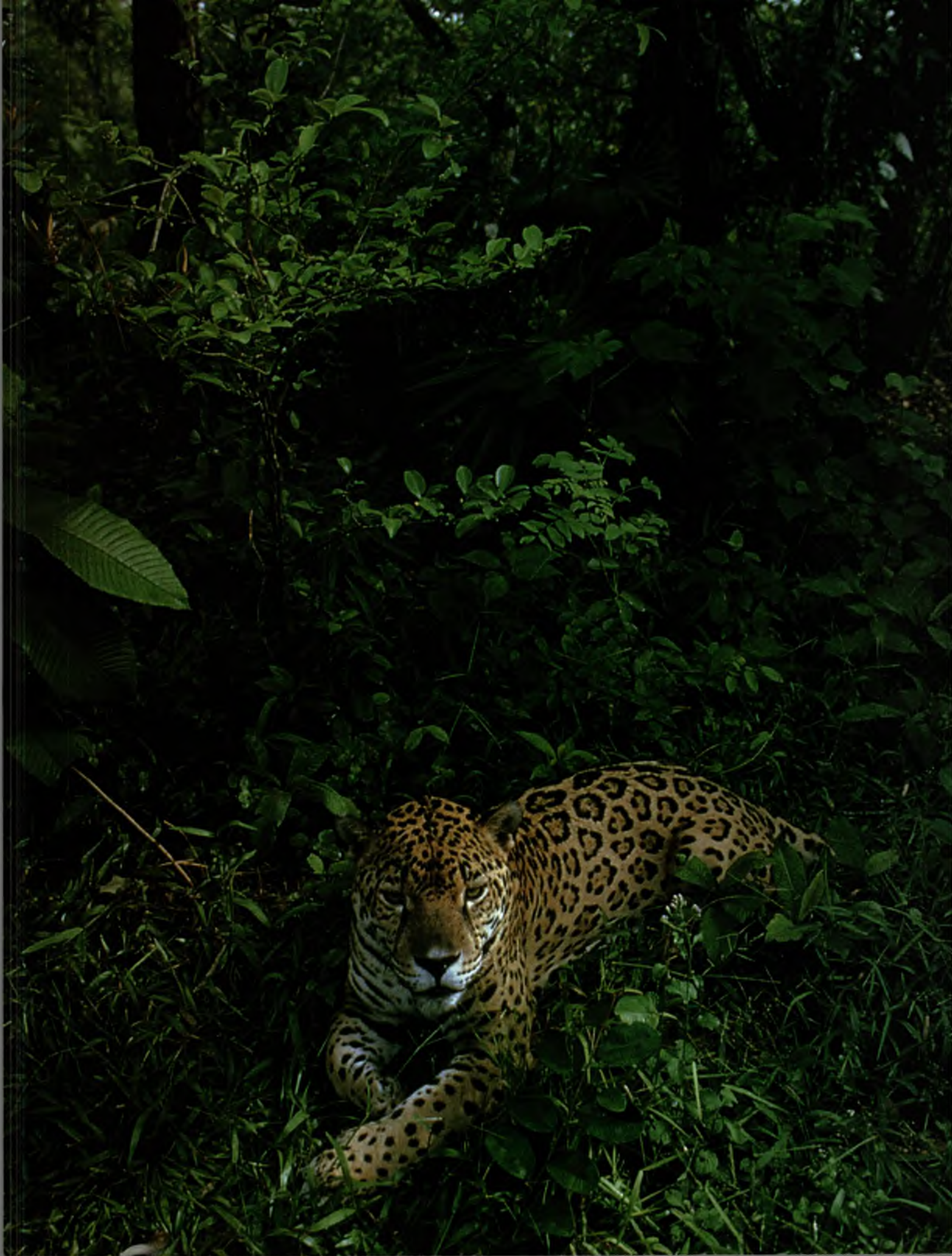
4. *If yu build ting eena e way, e nack it down.* (If you build something in its path, the tapir will knock it down.)

The tapir is Belize's national animal. It looks somewhat like a cross between an elephant, a hippo and a rhinoceros.

One of the Belize Zoo's star attractions is a tapir named Annie. She came out the afternoon that I was there and nuzzled the fence, looking for a handout from one of the young visitors. Annie had to be the ugliest, and most charming, animal I've ever encountered. The Belize Zoo began in 1983 with a dozen animals that had been trained as movie stars for natural history films. The founder of the zoo decided to display these animals in an educational environment, and over the years the zoo has developed into an exciting educational center where visitors can learn about the birds, mammals and reptiles of Belize. Most of the animals are endangered.

Belize is well-developed with good roads that lead to most of the main ruins and parks. Although the country is small, its main destinations are a good one-to-four-hour drive from each other. The best way to explore the country on your own is by renting a car, preferably a four-wheel drive vehicle for the dirt roads that lead to many of the ruins and parks. I rented a four-wheel drive Suzuki jeep near the airport in Belize City. Even in the car agency, the pride of the locals in their wildlife showed.







Posters of jaguars, toucans, and even far away albatross decorated the walls.

Rainforest wildlife is not the only attraction in Belize. Belize was home to one of the most outstanding New World civilizations—the magnificent Mayan culture. The Maya developed a complex and very accurate calendar and sophisticated agricultural techniques. They were the only fully literate pre-Columbian people in the Americas, and their hieroglyphic writing is comparable to that found in Egypt. Numerous jungle-veiled archaeological sites of the Maya culture can be found in Belize.

The sophistication and development of Mayan culture is clear in such sites as Altun Ha and Cerros, both of which feature causeways, reservoirs and canals, limestone block pyramids, plazas and ball courts.

I spent a day touring Lamanai (Submerged Crocodile), on the New River—a connecting point between the overland trade routes, that brought the cultural advances of inland Maya to Belize. The trip to Lamanai is made by river, winding through lush rainforests where I saw jacana, snail kites, crocodiles, iguanas and bats. Lamanai was one of Belize's largest ceremonial centers—occupied from 1500 BC to the 1800s. Ceremonial carvings and ornately carved heads decorate the ruins and temples.

I also visited Altun Ha (Water of the Rock), the most extensively excavated of all the Mayan centers in Belize. It was important as a trading center and as a link between the coast and the interior. The largest Mayan jade carving in existence was unearthed here, the carved head of Kinich Ahau, the Mayan Sun God.

No trip to Belize is complete without a visit to the barrier reef—second in size only to the Great Barrier

Getting There Travel Tips

You must have a valid passport to visit Belize and you may be asked to show a return ticket and money enough to sustain you during your visit. Citizens of the United States are not required to have a visa.

It is possible to drive from the United States to Belize. From Brownsville, Texas, to the Belize border is just less than 1,400 miles by way of Tampico, Veracruz, Villahermosa, Escarcega and Chetumal. The roads are paved, but the trip is rugged and complicated by requirements that travelers passing through Mexico purchase a bond to insure that they not sell their car while in Mexico. The bond must be bought at the border when entering Mexico and can be purchased *only* with a credit card. It is required to exit at the same border crossing. In addition you will be required to buy both Mexican, and Belizean insurance. Driving is probably more trouble than it's worth unless you have a strong desire to see Mexico from your own car, at your own pace.

If you plan on sailing to Belize the ports-of-entry are: San Pedro on Ambergris Cay, Belize City, and Punta Gorda in the south. To obtain clearance on Ambergris Cay you must pay to fly a customs agent to the mainland. You will be required to have the boat's official documentation, clearance from your last port-of-call, three copies of the crew and passenger manifesto, three copies of stores and list of cargo of board; and, if there isn't any, an imballast manifesto.

Most visitors will arrive in Belize at Philip Goldson International Airport nine miles from Belize City. TACA International Airlines has daily non-stop flights from Miami, New Orleans and Houston, and with a immediate connection in El Salvador, out of Los Angeles and San Francisco. For reservations or information on TACA Air

Continued on page 71





many peaceful resorts a short walk or boat ride away.

Hol Chan (little channel) Marine Reserve is the highlight of Ambergris Caye. Established May 1987, it features three distinct zones. A cut in the reef features clear water and huge schools of striped grunts, goatfish and snappers. The channel is well known for its green moray eels which live in the small caves along the walls. Fearsome in appearance, these morays are relatively harmless, although it can be quite unnerving when they come out of their caves and wrap their long snakelike bodies around you in search of a handout.

It can be quite unnerving when they come out of their caves and wrap their long snakelike bodies around you.

Hol Chan's second zone is a shallow seagrass bed in front of the channel, where groupers, schools of snapper, and brilliantly-colored queen triggersfish come in close. Sea turtles—green, hawksbill, and logger-heads—are often seen here. Because this area is so shallow and calm, this is a popular place for snorkelers and divers alike. Small patch reefs break up the seagrass bed in areas, and in the late afternoons, stingrays and harmless nurse sharks are often seen here.

Off the main island are Hol Chan's sometimes dark and mysterious underwater mangroves forests—home to crocodiles, manatees and a whole host of juvenile fish. Egrets and herons prowl the swamp by the hundreds.

On the morning of my last day in Belize, I chartered a plane to take me over the barrier reef. We flew over miles of deep azure seas, isolated desert islands, the barrier reef itself, and finally, circled over the Blue Hole, a world-famous diving site in the middle of the barrier reef. The Blue Hole is a collapsed underwater cave in the coral reef, which drops straight down to 200 feet. From the air, its center of deep blue, ringed with the golden tones of the coral reef surrounding it, formed what looked like a jewel at the bottom of a golden necklace—the perfect symbol for a gem of a country in Central America. 🐟



Reef of Australia. Diving the barrier reef takes you past deep cuts and passageways in the coral reef. The reef features a string of small offshore islands complete with swaying palm trees and white beaches. I stayed at the rustic but comfortable island of Ambergris Caye, in a thatched roof cabin at Captain Morgan's Retreat. Ambergris Caye is located at the northern tip of Belize, right on the barrier reef. In front of the resort were the beaches, palm trees and hammocks that complete everyone's idea of a tropical paradise. Between the reef itself and the beach lay acres of eelgrass beds, filled with eagle rays, turtles and other marine life. Nightlife on Ambergris Caye centers around the little fishing village of San Pedro, a clean, small town in which most people get around by bicycle. You can stay in town, or at one of the

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I chose the Galapagos because I wanted to see the big stuff. I've been diving for over 15 years, all over the world, and I've seen fantastic coral reefs, but I wanted to see schools of hammerhead sharks numbering in the hundreds, whale sharks, big schools of wild dolphins, and maybe even an orca. The place for this kind of high-voltage diving is the Galapagos Islands—more specifically the northern islands of Darwin and Wolf.

Not every live-aboard includes these islands in their regular itinerary, but the *Reina Silva* does. She has been escorting divers to the northern islands for over six years now. Her captain and crew have it down to an art. Her captain, Jacinto, was born in the Galapagos Islands and knows these waters well. He was a lobster fisherman in his youth and dived the northern islands every lobster season for 10 years. He knows the reefs. On special days, when the hammerheads are really thick, or when the whale sharks show up, the captain will even dive with the guests.

Jimmy Iglesias, the dive guide/naturalist, has been leading dives and land expeditions in the Galapagos for over 12 years and is known as the most experienced divemaster in the islands. The rest of the crew has worked as a team for five years, and performs like a finely tuned machine.

The 90-foot *Reina Silva* is fully air-conditioned. Each of eight cabins are complete with a private shower and bath. A desalinator provides plenty of fresh water. Laundry facilities are also available.

The plush lounge area is complete with stereo, CD, VCR and two televisions.

The built-in compressor with a cascade system allows for five minute tank fills. The boat provides eight extra tanks which are being filled while divers

REINA SILVIA

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
MARC BERNARDI



are submerged.

December, January, May, and June, are the best times to dive the northern islands. The weather is calm during these months, and the currents are at a minimum. Divers are divided into two groups depending on their experience. Less experienced divers receive as much supervision from the divemaster as

they need to feel comfortable. The more experienced divers usually want very little supervision, just a good pre-dive briefing, and the perfect dive site. Because each group has seven divers to one divemaster, even novice divers are

welcome, and given special attention.

We were met in Miami by an Aquatic Encounters representative, who led our group for the next 12 days. We arrived in Quito, Ecuador late that evening. Our luggage was loaded on a bus which took us to a very comfortable five-star hotel, the Alameda Real. Mario Moreno, our Quito guide, checked us in. The next day we took a half-day city tour of Quito, shot many pictures, and dined the local cuisine. The second day we flew to the Galapagos and were met by Jimmy Iglesias. Soon we were relaxing on the *Reina Silva*. I was surprised at how luxurious the vessel was. The chef, Patricio, and I soon became friends. I'm allergic to eggs, and require a special diet. Patricio took great pride in preparing my special meals. After an introductory lecture on the workings of

Continued on page 74





Thirty-five years in diving hasn't left us wet behind the ears.

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SUNSET HOUSE
Grand Cayman's Hotel For Divers By Divers





Ellen Sarbone

SUNSET HOUSE, GRAND CAYMAN

by Ellen Sarbone

I arrived in Grand Cayman eager to join the throngs of divers who've enjoyed the hospitality and professionalism for which Sunset House has been known since it opened in 1958. The tradition is ably maintained by Adrien and Bonnie Briggs and the family-run 59 room resort, whose slogan "For divers, by divers," is in evidence everywhere.

"Our main focus is on accommodating divers of all levels," says Briggs. "The next focus is on continuing education and training new divers."

The restful and modern flamingo pink buildings are nestled among a garden of trees and flowering shrubs on the coral shore just one mile south of George Town. I checked in, paid my \$10 key deposit and settled into my spacious and comfortable, air-conditioned room. It was very scuba diver friendly, with vinyl tile floors, two double beds, telephone, a good-sized bathroom complete with a great tub for cleaning gear, and a perfect 10 for the terrace—another necessity for me, although dive lockers are provided so you don't have to drag gear to your room.

Next stop was the Sunset Divers

shop where Ken Thompson, the Operations Manager, checked my C-card, proficiency level and equipment needs. He made all arrangements, and patiently explained procedures and the dive schedule. With 6 custom-made dive boats, there's a lot of room for flexibility in scheduling both groups and individuals.

Hotel guests have priority for space on the boats, but divers staying elsewhere can call in the afternoon to see if space is available for the following day.

Bright and early next morning, under a brilliant, cloudless sky, I boarded the Sun Diver for my rendezvous with Grand Cayman's dive wonders. We cast off and sped toward Eagle's Nest, 10 minutes away. Ken Helmer briefed us on the site, dive profile, and for the first-day divers, emphasized the 100-foot maximum and no-gloves rules. One giant stride into the 80 degree Caribbean and I was gliding down the barrel sponge-encrusted wall, admiring the large ocean triggerfish, brittle starfish resting

comfortably at home in the spacious sponges. I glanced at my console—98 feet, time to level off. We cruised at 60 feet for the rest of the dive, entranced by the turquoise blue and lavender vase sponges, neon tunicates, and 2 large Spanish Mackerel that accompanied us for awhile.

The second dive at Bikini Reef was only 34 feet maximum, but one of my favorites. Coral spurs hang over sandy swim-throughs and there are caverns and tunnels full of huge tarpon. Perhaps the proliferation is the result of the site's proximity to the Wharf restaurant where fish are fed at dinnertime. I also found three different kinds of lobster—spiny, slipper and spanish.

That afternoon we made a 1-tank dive at Stingray City. We were driven to the North Sound in a comfortable van. Our gear had gone by truck earlier. I have to admit I was skeptical because the dive sounded like a lot of hype, especially when I saw 12 other boats, some crammed with snorkelers already there! How wrong I was.

Sunset Divers uses a different bait, and takes its divers to an adjacent site, Sandbar. After a careful explanation of what to do and how to act, we stepped into the shallow water and the fun began. What a thrill it is to interact with these majestic creatures. At least 30 southern stingrays swooped and dipped and swarmed over us. After my initial surprise at the bump and run, tactics of one bold ray, I got the technique—keep the food in my closed hand, let the ray pass over it to get the scent, then open my hand slowly, palm up at the second

pass. When the bait was exhausted, we continued the dive amongst the coral bumps that sheltered a large green moray, a spotted moray, a spiny

lobster, and the usual assortment of tropicals. The Stingrays also continued to visit.

All of Sunset Divers' 15 instructors and divemasters showed true professionalism and discipline. They watched over the divers in their charge from cast-off and briefing until wrap-up and return to the dock. Nothing escaped their experienced eyes and safety was paramount. They made sure that everyone stayed within the 100 foot limit. This is typical of the concern and

Continued on page 68

With 6 custom-made dive boats, there's a lot of room for flexibility in scheduling both groups and individuals

TRIPS, continued from page 22

these railings, and down cargo nets to escape the sinking ship. At one spot there is a machine gun and a helmet lying in the silt, both encrusted with growth and barely recognizable. We exit the deck by swimming over the railing, and work our way along the hull towards the bow. As we come even with the bridge, we spot a sleeping turtle. A large hole in the side, made by salvagers, invites a trio of bluefin trevally jacks into the interior of the ship. The hull is littered with warheads, whose brass casings were removed as salvage. A shark cage stands as tribute to the salvagers' fears. The hull resembles a reef more than the side of a ship, with small patches of coral growing on it as they would on a hard sea bottom. Again we ascend to the safety stops, play hide 'n seek with the anemone fish and pay our respects to Boris.

The second day we set off to visit The Lady—an ivory statue of a lady and a unicorn above a fireplace in what used to be a smoking room. Where we exited the Promenade deck the day before, we pass into the ship through a small door. At about 145 feet, I see her appear out of the gloom. I am able to hold off the effects of narcosis long enough to

photograph the statue and pose for a picture with it. We exit through a corridor one level from the Promenade deck, where we find a double row of heads installed for the use of the enlisted men. We exit through the front of the bridge and swim over the cranes on the bow.

There are six main dives on the wreck. The forward hold and Promenade deck are the easiest with maximum depths of about 110 feet. Next is the Medicine room and officers' head at about 120 feet. The visit to The Lady, and the engine control room are both at 150 feet. Each dive has something new to see because of all the war paraphernalia lying around, dropped wherever the owner was when he abandoned the ship.





Allan has spent a lot of time exploring the wreck, and matching what he finds with original plans of the ship. He has worked hard to make sure that visiting divers enjoy themselves, and have safe dives. Safety stops are performed at 20 and 10 feet at the end of every dive. The dive leaders check everyone for diving skills and air consumption during the first two dives, to aid in planning for the more adventuresome dives. Spare tanks with

regulators are located at the safety stops in case someone should require them. Because of the depths (in excess of 100 feet), and the size of the wreck, these dives are not for the novice diver. It is definitely worth diving with Allan or one of his guides, because of their experience and knowledge of the site.

Vanuatu is just becoming a major dive destination for U.S. divers, although it has long been popular with divers from Australia and New Zealand. Vanuatu offers excellent diving. The live-aboard dive boat *MV Coriolis*, based out of Port Villa, the capitol, dives more of the islands and not just the *President Coolidge*. You might consider this option if you're looking for a broader dive experience. To get to Espiritu Santo from Port Villa, you must fly turbo prop, which takes about two hours.

If you like to dive wrecks, then the *President Coolidge* is a must. The condition of the wreck is excellent, and there is plenty to see. There is, however, very little coral other than at Allan's Garden. You will want to spend at least a week if you wish to make all of the main dives on the *President Coolidge*, but this is a great dive, and well worth the effort.

—John Nikel



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XMAS, continued from page 22

in one dive. This one of the few sites with detectable current, but it is a gentle, one-knot current that brings plankton-rich waters, enticing many pelagics and encouraging great forests of rainbow-hued soft corals, but not hampering the diving.

Adventure seekers will want to dive the Bay of Wrecks on the northeast side of the island. It can be done either as a boat dive (a 90-minute boat ride) or as a shore dive (A half-hour truck ride). In spite of the name there are no wrecks, but you will be rewarded with an electrifying wall dive that starts at 15 feet and plunges to thousands. Rare tropical creatures

are easily approached here and there are also exciting pelagic encounters to be had, including reports of mating black-tipped reef sharks. Large marine turtles frequent the bay, as they do all the waters along the northern coast.

When it's time to put up your tanks Anderson doubles as a first-rate guide to

the flora and fauna of the island. Christmas Island hosts one of the largest seabird colonies in the Pacific sheltering an estimated 14 million birds, including shearwaters, petrels, boobies, frigates, tropicbirds, terns and noddies.

Finally, let Anderson introduce you to the island's greatest resource, the I-

making visits to the local schools and villages very rewarding. Don't miss Saturday night's luau at the hotel where you will be treated to a fantastic buffet and performances of traditional song and dance by natives performers. The only postcards on the island are sold by a French priest who has lived in Kiribati for over 32 years, making him the senior resident on the island, but the post office has a beautiful collection of stamps, each bearing a colorful rendition of local sealife.

Christmas Island offers truly spectacular diving with virgin reefs, in warm clear waters teeming with large varieties of tropical fish and pelagics. Much of the island still awaits

exploration and there are opportunities for visitors to explore, and even name, new dive spots. With its friendly service, consistently fine climate and proximity to home, Christmas Island is destined to become one of the Pacific's most popular dive sites.

—Murray Kaufmann & Richard McEnry

Much of the island still awaits exploration and there are opportunities for visitors to explore, and even name, new dive spots.

Kiribati. These gentle, warm islanders lead a traditional Micronesian way of life based on fishing and coconut harvesting. They are easily approached and photographed as they go about their daily activities. Because of their history as a British colony, the literacy rate is high, nearly everyone speaks English,

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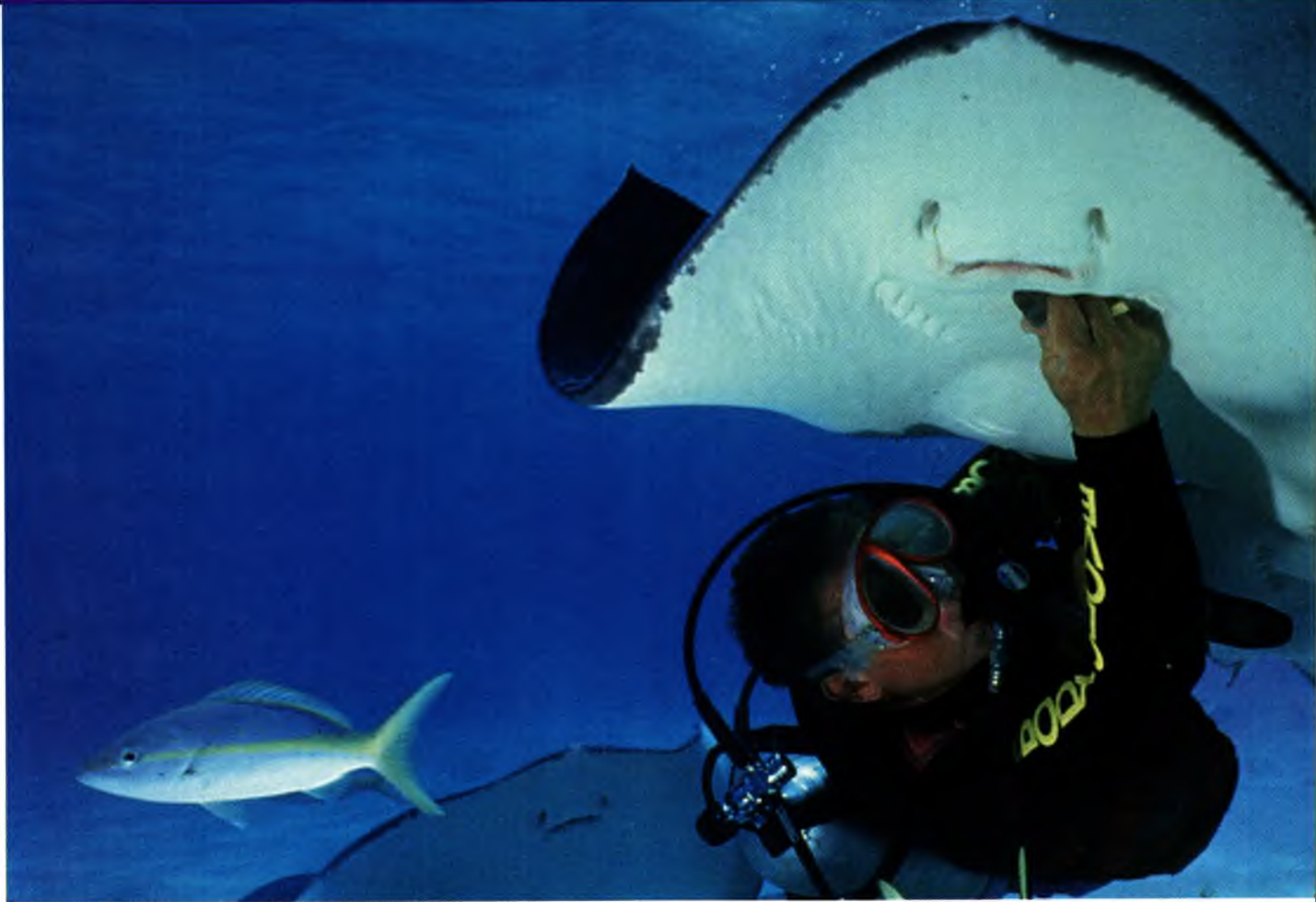
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CRUSIN', continued from page 37
lines."

International law prohibits most dumping at sea, especially plastics. While it's easy for governments to catch violators in port, tight enforcement there sometimes encourages dumping at sea.

A new dock was proposed several years ago on the southwest side of the island to service cruise ships. A deep channel would have been required and that would mean blasting several reefs. Not only would those reefs have been destroyed, but sediment during construction would have smothered other reefs in the area. The idea was defeated, but the battle has moved to a new location.

A cruise ship dock has been proposed in the community of West Bay

toward the north end of Grand Cayman. Conservationists are outraged.

"The Florida Cruise Ship Association and the West Bay politicians want to see more cruise ship business in their community," says Briggs. "The best dive sites on the island are in the West Bay area. Dive sites such as Orange Canyon and Trinity Caves would be destroyed, or severely impacted by construction. It's the same fight we waged on the south end of the island."

The greatest impact could be on the people who flock to Cayman for its unspoiled diving. The trick will be for the island people to see that their island treasure neither stolen by visitors, nor pirated by their own.

*"The best dive
sites on the
island are in the
West Bay area.
Dive sites
such as Orange
Canyon and Trinity
Caves would be
destroyed."*

SUNSET HOUSE, continued from page 63


care that all Caymanians demonstrate for their tourist and guests.

Shore diving is delightful and simple at the resort, with easy access to its own reef just 200 yards out. The Wreck of the *David Nicholson* is 240 yards out in 65 feet of water. Both sites are teeming with tropicals—sharpnose pufferfish, longsnout butterflyfish, four-eye banded butterflyfish, jacks, groupers, angels, plus sea fans, coral and gorgonians. Advanced diving on the north and east walls is scheduled on a regular basis. *Sunray*, the newest boat is usually kept on the North Sound, along with *Manta*. Both are used for all-day, 3-tank trips to remote areas. Both boats can be easily shifted back to the westside if needed.

The seaside My Bar is a perfect spot to gather and discuss the day's diving, settle the world's problems, or just sit under an umbrella on the deck enjoying tasty snacks and liquid

refreshments.

Having Sunset Divers right on the property is a big advantage, but in addition to the diving, Sunset House has several amenities guests will enjoy. The beautiful pool and jacuzzi overlook the Caribbean, with a view toward George Town. There's a T.V. Lounge and hot coffee is always available in the lobby. Delicious meals are available at Seaharvest Restaurant if you're too relaxed to leave the premises, and Cathy Church's Underwater Photography Centre is always ready to fill your every photographic need—instruction, supplies, rentals, repairs, videos, and framed photos are all available.

On my visit Sunset House didn't just live up to its reputation, it exceeded it. I left with a real appreciation for the many rewards of diving Grand Cayman, and knowing that I'll be among the many who return to Sunset House again and again. 

*I'll be among
the many who
return to
Sunset House
again and
again.*

REEF, continued from page 39

done," says Bunny Foster, who, along with his brother Ronnie and wife Mary, runs Indies divers. The curious thing is that, of the three, only Mary dives. Bunny and Ronnie prefer the working end of a rod and reel, but all three are concerned about the future of Cayman's marine environment and have been active in promoting the placement of mooring buoys. More than 200 have been placed at dive sites in the past 15 years.

"Anchors were really tearing up the reef," says Ronnie. "Every site had three or four boats on it, four times a day. You can imagine what that was doing."

Large white scars can still be seen on brain and star corals at many of the sites.

The Fosters instruct their dive crews to scrupulously observe all the environmental rules, especially when it comes to mooring.

"We get good cooperation from the other dive boats as well," says Mary. "If a buoy is taken, you simply move to a dive site where there is a buoy rather than throwing an anchor out on the coral."

Everyone who dives, snorkels or

fishes puts stress on the marine environment. Indies encourages each of their clients to minimize his or her environmental impact. One strategy is to discourage the use of gloves.

"If you have gloves on, you're more likely to want to touch the coral. If your hands are bare, you'll take greater care about where you put them," Mary adds.

Buoyancy control is another factor the Fosters try to make divers aware of. Careless diving can destroy in an instant what it took tiny reef creatures years to build. Star coral, for example, grow less than one half inch per year. As little as a 2 percent reduction in live coral cover will significantly reduce both the total number, and variety of fish living on the reef as well as invertebrates like crab, shrimp and octopus.

The Fosters believe it is important to set a good example for visiting divers.

"By the end of a week of diving most divers are very conscious of what they do underwater. If they see somebody touching the coral they'll motion for them to back off. Everyone wants to make sure the beauty is still there on their next visit."

LIVE-ABOARD, continued from page 61


the boat, and diving procedures, we geared up for our first dive.

It was like a dream. We dove with 300 hammerheads at Darwin, all in one school. They came within seven feet of me and looked me over while I tried to photograph them.

We did three dives each day at Darwin and Wolf, one of which provided a 10 minute experience with a baby whale shark!

When I heard dolphins squealing my dive buddy and I swam out to them. They indulged us with their presence for at least 15 minutes. My diving dreams were completely realized. The dive guides shot video on each dive, which was edited to music and sent to my home free of charge—a great bonus. The dinghy was always close when I surfaced, and they were very cautious with my camera gear.

The land expeditions were wonderful, too. We had to drag even the most hard-core divers away for more diving. Would I recommend this adventure to my friends? Absolutely.

For more information, contact: Aquatic Encounters, 1966 Hardscrabble Place, Boulder, CO 80303. Phone (303) 494-8384; Fax: (303) 494-1202. 



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Belize, continued from page 56
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Taxi fare from the airport to Belize City is about \$15 U.S. Remember to save \$11.25 U.S. for the departure tax when you leave.

The unit of currency in Belize is the Belize dollar and the exchange rate has held fairly steady at BZE \$2 to US \$1 for some time. All of the large hotels accept US dollars, but many of the smaller establishments accept only Belize dollars. Credit cards are generally accepted only by the larger businesses.

Local time in Belize is Greenwich Mean Time, minus 6 hours. The same as US Central Standard Time. There is no Daylight Savings Time in Belize.

Travelers from the US to countries south of the border are sometimes stricken with with uncomfortable and inconveient intestinal distress—a well-known ailment that goes by many names. There are many theories about cause and cure, but the most reliable science informs us that it is caused by bacteria, and the most effective cure is to be careful about what you put in your mouth.

Water is the chief suspect, and that includes ice cubes in your drinks and brushing your teeth. The locals in Belize City proclaim their water to be safe, and it seems to be—use your own best judgement. More isolated regions should be treated with more caution. Boiling will make water safe to drink, but this can be a problem if you don't have the facilities or fuel. It might be wise to carry water purification tablets or a reliable water filter for your forays into the more remote areas. Beer makes a good substitute for those who appreciate the brew, as well as that ubiquitous beverage—Coka Cola.

Food is generally safe as long as it is cooked. Be mindful of fruits and vegetables when they have been washed in the local water. You may want to ease into the local cuisine if you're not used to a spicy menu.

Like most places Belize has its share of mosquitos. They are mostly just an annoyance, but there is some small risk of malaria in rural areas. Some precautionary measures and anti-malarial medications will effectively eliminate the risk. The Center for Disease Control operates a hotline that will update you on all current disease risks in any area of the world. The number is (404) 332-4559. From a disease standpoint Belize is a very safe destination. 🐟

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DOLPHINS, continued from page 50
ease. Dolphins breathe less frequently than humans and compensate by breathing more deeply and extracting more oxygen from each breath. They also store more oxygen in their tissues and can refill their lungs in the incredibly short interval of one-fifth of a second.

We are just beginning to appreciate the complexities of dolphin behavior. Studies on resident pods in Shark Bay, Australia, have demonstrated a wide range of social inter-actions, from benevolent to benighted. Males fight savagely, make shifting political alliances, herd females, and even engage in what can only be described as kidnapping and rape.

Admittedly an anthropocentric judgement, but, as Teri Bolton, marine mammal specialist on the staff of IMS

observes, "They definitely have a dark side."

Playful, crafty, benevolent, savage—it is not easy to get a firm fix on these fascinating ani-mals. Perhaps their complexity and protean nature have as much to do with the profound sense of mystery they impart as anything.

In the pantheon of ancient Greek mythology, Glaucos, a humble sponge diver, became a sea-god by eating a magical seaweed. The

change enabled him to swim with grace and speed and to stay submerged for long periods—to live, in essence, like a dolphin.

Sculptures of Glaucos generally depict him with dolphins frolic-ing in his beard—the face of humanity in a mystical union with nature and the sea. It seems just as likely we see the face of Glaucos reflected in the dolphin. >🐬

*Males
fight savagely,
make shifting political
alliances, herd females,
and even engage in what
can only be described
as kidnapping
and rape.*



Photo by Darrell Jones

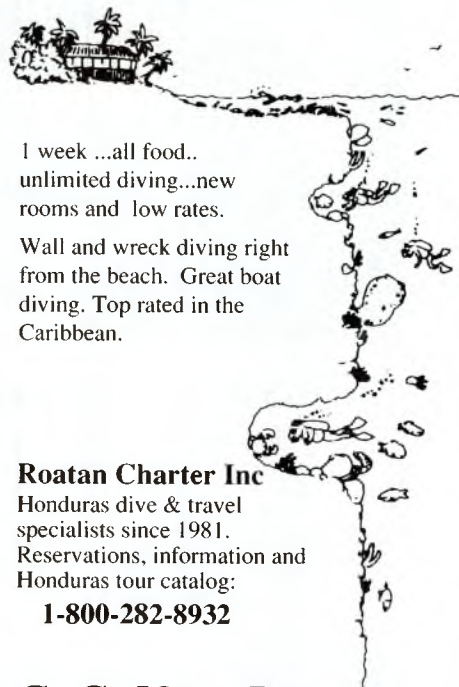
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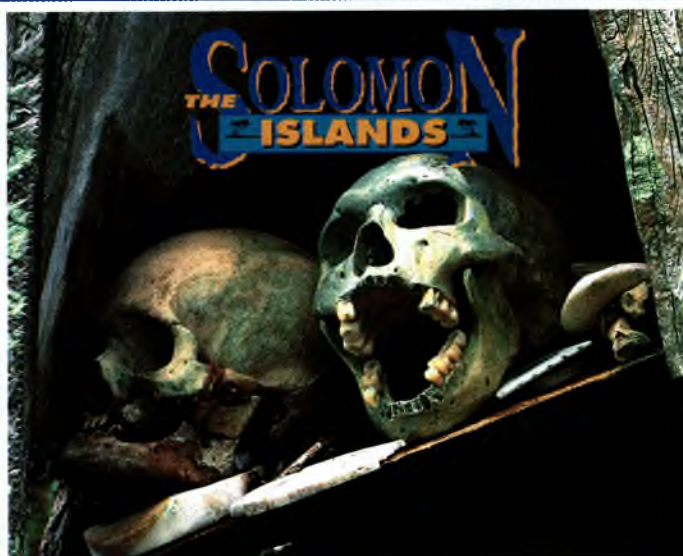
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Solomons, continued from page 45

about one hundred people and receives few visitors except on shopping days. It is nestled on the edge of a quiet lagoon and filled with the sights and sounds of the islands and its people. The houses and yards are kept neat and most have tidy flower gardens. Naked children played and washed in a small public water faucet. We were ushered from house to house to admire the art of these warm and friendly people.

The wood carvers of Telina village are renown for their carving skills and offer items stylistically unlike any you will find anywhere else in the world. A favorite theme is the marine creatures that inhabit the waters surrounding their island world. I purchased a tiny turtle crafted from rare and valued ebony. What could be a better souvenir for the traveling diver? The craftsmen in Telina offer good prices for those willing to make the long journey to shop direct.

With shopping complete, we began our trip home from market. Clutching the momentos of our adventure, we glided across the glassy lagoon, past islands and villages, as the sun began its fiery descent into the sea. The sky colored with dusk and we drifted into the dreamy magic of the warm Solomon Island night. 🐢



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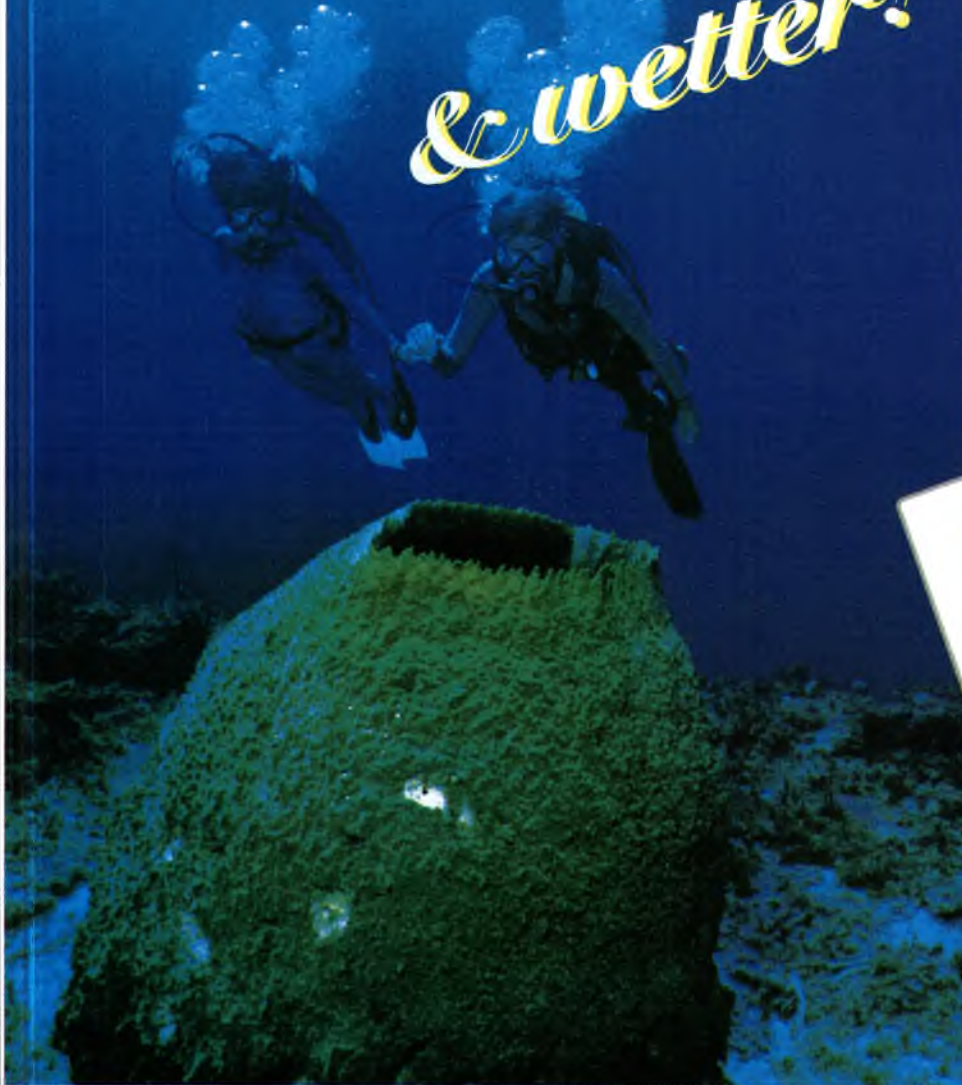


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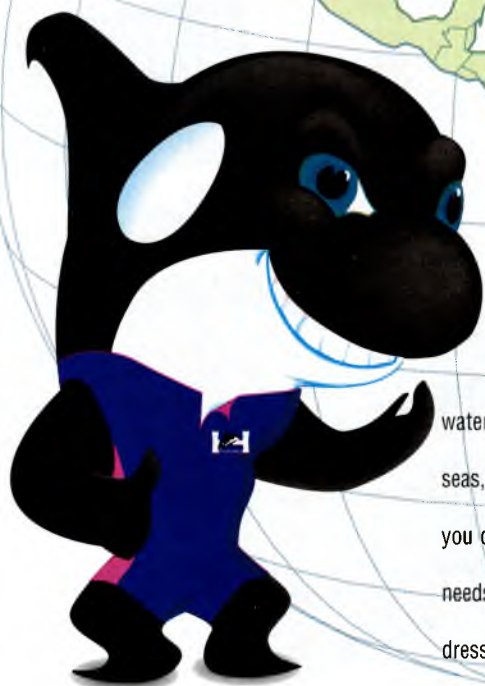


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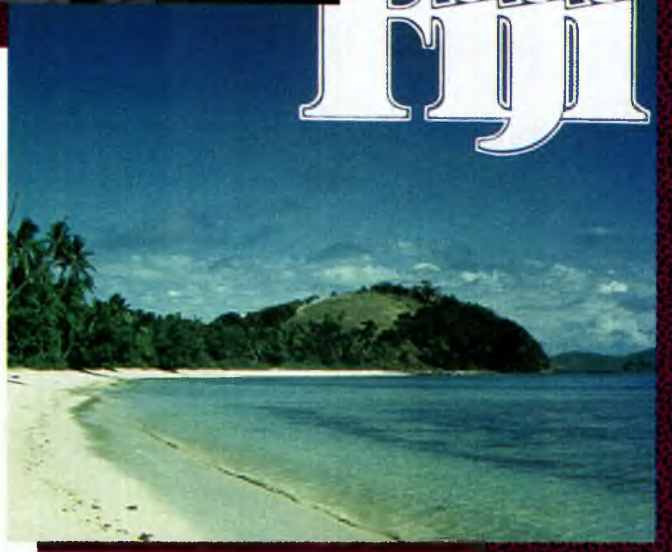
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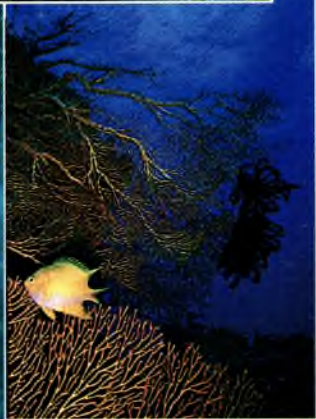
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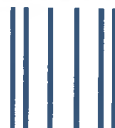
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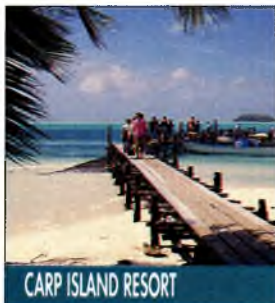
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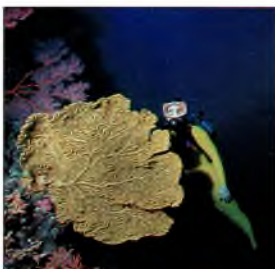
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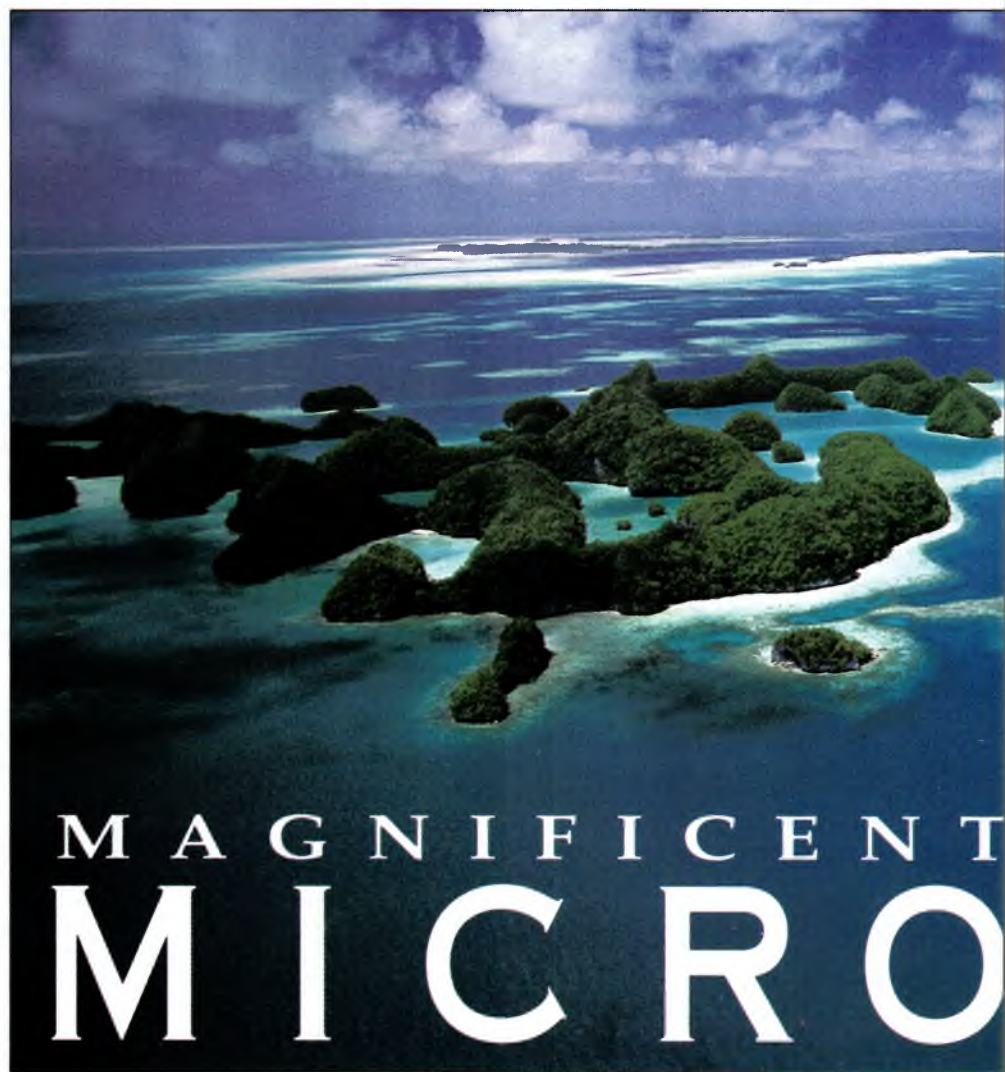
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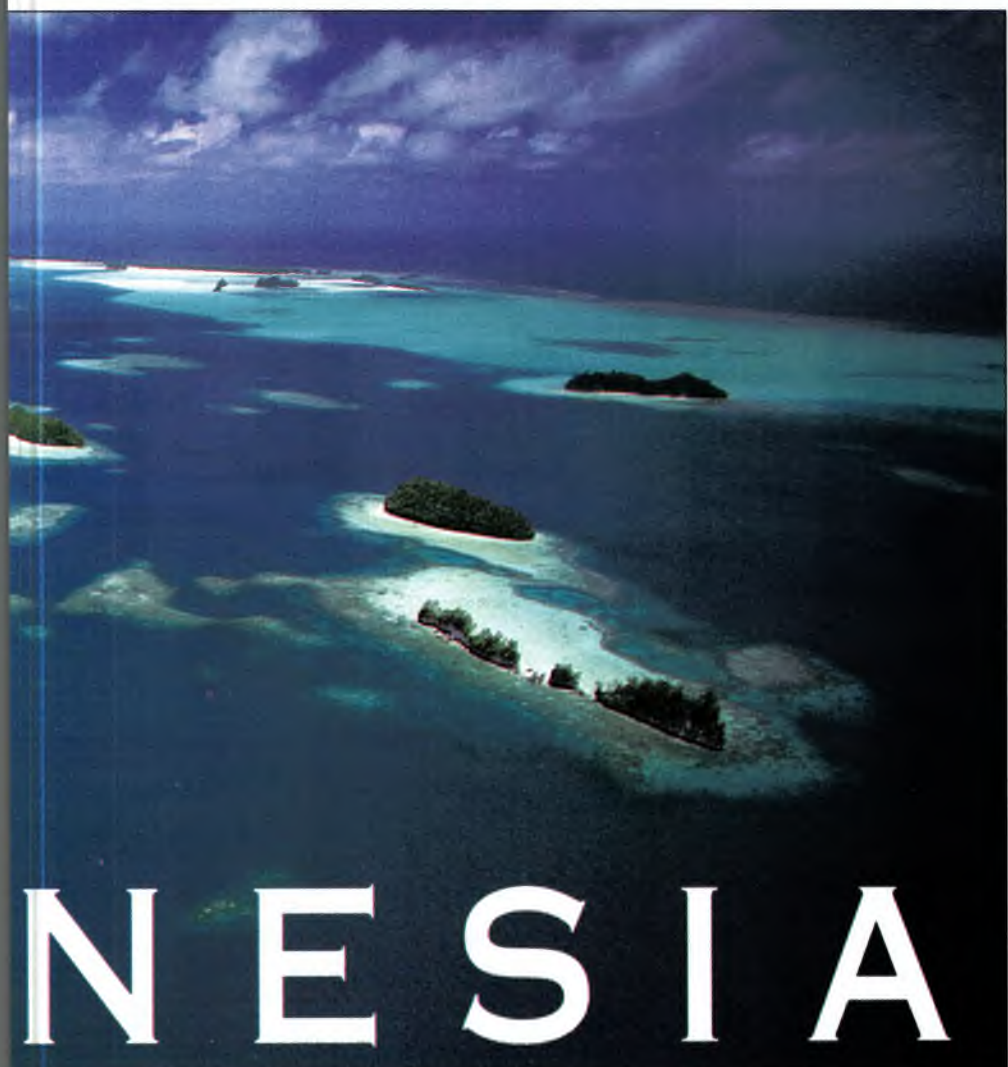


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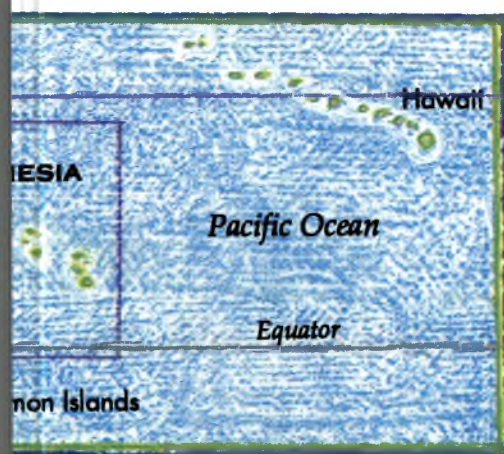
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BLUE HOLE

by Bradford Marx

Heavier than I, my father found it more difficult going. His legs stuck in the silty mud. He lost one sandal and then the other, and by the time I reached water deep enough to don my snorkel gear, out over the sea grass, he was still struggling in the mangroves.

"Look for the sandy mounds. Walk across them," I called out. By then I was treading water in the cool rush of green that fed the blue hole at high tide.

"The what?" he shouted.

I sensed a mild form of panic.

"The sandy mounds."

"What's under the mounds?"

"Just harder sand. You won't sink as much."

To the northeast I saw a black rain cloud spit a fiery bolt over Great Abaco. It was late.

Only recently had I learned about blue holes—the doorways to a complex of interlocking underwater caves. In the last one hundred million years the earth's plates have shifted and cut into the miles-deep mass of limestone supporting the Bahamas.

The blue hole my father and I stalked lies in a sheltered cove off main Abaco Island. Roughly 30 feet wide at the mouth, the descent into the hole is marked at regular intervals by reef-encrusted circular ledges, disappearing out of sight in the darkness.

Blue hole is something of a misnomer, for only on the approach does it appear blue. The resident snapper dart through the aqua haze in the eight feet of water above the first ledge, but beyond that all you see is black.

My father caught up with me and we compared scratches. The tide was coming in, he assured me, going back would be easy. In a few moments we were hovering over the hole.

"Wouldn't it be incredible to scuba into the hole," he mused.

I nodded. The truth was I was afraid of the hole. Contemplating it left me with a dizzying sense of vertigo. Where did it go? Did it spread out in a network of underground streams? Did it plunge straight down to the base rock in the forever-unlit depths?

It didn't help to know this particular hole had been the cause of several deaths. I couldn't forget the tale of a local dive guide who'd responded to a distress call on the radio. When he arrived here he found a woman near hysterics,

pleading for help. Her husband had descended into the hole alone and had not returned. The guide recalled the water was abnormally calm that day, he remembered seeing a large school of grouper glide casually by. He secured a lifeline and made his way down. At 50 feet he discovered the body, not trapped, but slightly curled as though asleep, on a ledge near the entrance of a coal-black cave. The cause of death was drowning, but the cause of drowning was unknown. The guide told me he hadn't returned to the hole since that afternoon.

That wasn't the only mysterious tragedy associated with the hole, either. Not long ago two young friends, newly certified, died here along with a local divemaster. The three had entered a cave and, although their lifeline was slightly tangled outside on an outcropping of coral, there was no satisfactory explanation of why the three had failed to surface. The guide was very experienced and all had sufficient oxygen. Hours later,

when local professionals were enlisted to go down and retrieve the bodies the only thing still living at 70 feet was their underwater lamp. A tiny prick of light just visible on the surface.

When I was younger I believed that my father knew everything there was to know. What he couldn't explain to me, I assumed I couldn't understand. A school of yellow tang moved in and my dad's eyes widened registering their beauty. The tang circled the upper ledge, foraging the loose rocks for food and then bunched and headed south along the channel that we'd follow out.

Suddenly, my dad dove. Bubbles from his snorkel clouded my mask and burst on my cheeks. When the water cleared, I saw my father struggling near the ledge with a taut section of line that snaked around a rock before disappearing into the hole.

He came to the surface, breathless and excited. "I wonder where it goes."

I didn't. As far as I could tell, the line ran to infinity, and something inside urged me to leave. My father dove deeper into the hole, still following the line, down where the color of the hole took on an ominous brown. I wanted my dad away. If he didn't know where the line stopped, I knew we weren't ready to find out.

"Let's go," I said, when he surfaced again. I pointed to the island where a forest of casserinias bowed before a dark curtain of drenching rain. "A squall's moving in."

I swam for shallower waters. He followed.



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